

SUMMIT PAPERS

Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Chicago
October 26-28, 1978

Chief Editor
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OCT 29 1978

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THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY

Preface

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue

arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.

A Short Statement

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

Articles of Affirmation and Denial

- Article I. We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.
- We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.
- Article II. We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.
- We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.
- Article III. We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.
- We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.
- Article IV. We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.
- We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.
- Article V. We affirm that God's revelation within the Holy Scriptures was progressive.
- We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.
- Article VI. We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.
- We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.
- Article VII. We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.
- We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII. We affirm that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

Article IX. We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X. We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Article XI. We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Article XII. We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Article XIII. We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

- Article XIV. We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.
- We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.
- Article XV. We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.
- We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.
- Article XVI. We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.
- We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.
- Article XVII. We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.
- We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.
- Article XVIII. We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.
- We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.
- Article XIX. We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.
- We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

Exposition

Our understanding of the doctrine of inerrancy must be set in the context of the broader teachings of the Scripture concerning itself. This exposition gives an account of the outline of doctrine from which our summary statement and articles are drawn.

Creation, Revelation and Inspiration

The Triune God, who formed all things by his creative utterances and governs all things by His Word of decree, made mankind in His own image for a life of communion with Himself, on the model of the eternal fellowship of loving communication within the Godhead. As God's image-bearer, man was to hear God's Word addressed to him and to respond in the joy of adoring obedience. Over and above God's self-disclosure in the created order and the sequence of events within it, human beings from Adam on have received verbal messages from Him, either directly, as stated in Scripture, or indirectly in the form of part or all of Scripture itself.

When Adam fell, the Creator did not abandon mankind to final judgment but promised salvation and began to reveal Himself as Redeemer in a sequence of historical events centering on Abraham's family and culminating in the life, death, resurrection, present heavenly ministry, and promised return of Jesus Christ. Within this frame God has from time to time spoken specific words of judgment and mercy, promise and command, to sinful human beings so drawing them into a covenant relation of mutual commitment between Him and them in which He blesses them with gifts of grace and they bless Him in responsive adoration. Moses, whom God used as mediator to carry His words to His people at the time of the Exodus, stands at the head of a long line of prophets in whose mouths and writings God put His words for delivery to Israel. God's purpose in this succession of messages was to maintain His covenant by causing His people to know His Name--that is, His nature--and His will both of precept and purpose in the present and for the future. This line of prophetic spokesmen from God came to completion in Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Word, who was Himself a prophet--more than a prophet, but not less--and in the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation. When God's final and climactic message, His word to the world concerning Jesus Christ, had been spoken and elucidated by those in the apostolic circle, the sequence of revealed messages ceased. Henceforth the Church was to live and know God by what He had already said, and said for all time.

At Sinai God wrote the terms of His covenant on tables of stone, as His enduring witness and for lasting accessibility, and throughout the period of prophetic and apostolic revelation He prompted men to write the messages given to and through them, along with celebratory records of His dealings with His people, plus moral reflections on covenant life and forms of praise and prayer for covenant mercy. The theological reality of inspiration in the producing of Biblical documents corresponds to that of spoken prophecies: although the human writers' personalities were expressed in what they wrote, the words were divinely constituted. Thus, what Scripture says, God says; its authority is His authority, for He is its ultimate Author, having given it through the minds and words of chosen and prepared men who in freedom and faithfulness "spoke from God as they

were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:21). Holy Scripture must be acknowledged as the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin.

Authority: Christ and the Bible

Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is the Word made flesh, our Prophet, Priest, and King, is the ultimate Mediator of God's communication to man, as He is of all God's gifts of grace. The revelation He gave was more than verbal; He revealed the Father by His presence and His deeds as well. Yet His words were crucially important; for He was God, He spoke from the Father, and His words will judge all men at the last day.

As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture. The Old Testament looked ahead to Him; the New Testament looks back to His first coming and on to His second. Canonical Scripture is the divinely inspired and therefore normative witness to Christ. No hermeneutic, therefore, of which the historical Christ is not the focal point is acceptable. Holy Scripture must be treated as what it essentially is--the witness of the Father to the incarnate Son.

It appears that the Old Testament canon had been fixed by the time of Jesus. The New Testament canon is likewise now closed inasmuch as no new apostolic witness to the historical Christ can now be borne. No new revelation (as distinct from Spirit-given understanding of existing revelation) will be given until Christ comes again. The canon was created in principle by divine inspiration. The Church's part was to discern the canon which God had created, not to devise one of its own.

The word *canon*, signifying a rule or standard, is a pointer to authority, which means the right to rule and control. Authority in Christianity belongs to God in His revelation, which means, on the one hand, Jesus Christ, the living Word, and, on the other hand, Holy Scripture, the written Word. But the authority of Christ and that of Scripture are one. As our Prophet, Christ testified that Scripture cannot be broken. As our Priest and King, He devoted His earthly life to fulfilling the law and the prophets, even dying in obedience to the words of Messianic prophecy. Thus, as He saw Scripture attesting Him and His authority, so by His own submission to Scripture He attested its authority. As He bowed to His Father's instruction given in His Bible (our Old Testament), so He requires His disciples to do--not, however, in isolation but in conjunction with the apostolic witness to Himself which He undertook to inspire by His gift of the Holy Spirit. So Christians show themselves faithful servants of their Lord by bowing to the divine instruction given in the prophetic and apostolic writings which together make up our Bible.

By authenticating each other's authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority. The Biblically-interpreted Christ and the Christ-centered, Christ-proclaiming Bible are from this standpoint one. As from the fact of inspiration we infer that what Scripture says, God says, so from the revealed relation between Jesus Christ and Scripture we may equally declare that what Scripture says, Christ says.

Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation

Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called *infallible* and *inerrant*. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths.

Infallible signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters.

Similarly, *inerrant* signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.

We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. In inspiration, God utilized the culture and conventions of his penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise.

So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.

The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (*e.g.*, the lies of Satan), or seeming discrepancies between one passage and another. It is not right to set the so-called "phenomena" of Scripture against the teaching of Scripture about itself. Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved, will encourage our faith, and where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions.

Inasmuch as all Scripture is the product of a single divine mind, interpretation must stay within the bounds of the analogy of Scripture and eschew hypotheses that would correct one Biblical passage by another, whether in the name of progressive revelation or of the imperfect enlightenment of the inspired writer's mind.

Although Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional views of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action.

Skepticism and Criticism

Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world-views have been developed which involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism which denies that God is knowable, the rationalism which denies that He is incomprehensible, the idealism which denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism which denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-biblical principles seep into men's theologies at presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible.

Transmission and Translation

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.

Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the *autographa*. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit's constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Inerrancy and Authority

In our affirmation of the authority of Scripture as involving its total truth, we are consciously standing with Christ and His apostles, indeed with the whole Bible and with the main stream of Church history from the first days until very recently. We are concerned at the casual, inadvertent, and seemingly thoughtless way in which a belief of such far-reaching importance has been given up by so many in our day.

We are conscious too that great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the total truth of the Bible whose authority one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible which God gave loses its authority, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one's critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has started. This means that at bottom independent reason now has authority, as opposed to Scriptural teaching. If this is not seen and if for the time being basic evangelical doctrines are still held, persons denying the full truth of Scripture may claim an evangelical identity while methodologically

they have moved away from the evangelical principle of knowledge to an unstable subjectivism, and will find it hard not to move further.

We affirm that what Scripture says, God says. May He be glorified.
Amen and Amen.

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CHRIST'S VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

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PAPER SUMMARY

Christ's view of Scripture stands out with great clarity for those who believe that the gospels, whether inerrant or not, present a fairly reliable account of his teaching. We have a wealth of material coming from all four gospels and from all the major strata of the gospels. We have hundreds of quotations and allusions thrown up spontaneously from a great variety of situations, and these are often the more telling for revealing his basic assumptions rather than his specific teachings. He consistently treats the historical narratives as straightforward records of fact, and the force of his teaching often depends on their literal truth. He uses the teaching of the Old Testament as a court of appeal in matters of controversy in both doctrine and ethics. That this was his own standpoint and not an *ad hominem* stance adopted by way of accommodation to his hearers, is shown by his use of Scripture in countering the devil. That it was not the result of his human limitations, is shown by his stress on Scripture after his resurrection from the dead. He treats the very words of Scripture, even its jots and tittles, as inspired. He recognizes that its books have human authors, but to him the primary author of Scripture is God himself. It is this attestation of detailed verbal truth coupled with historical and doctrinal truth, which necessitates a doctrine of inerrancy in historical as well as in doctrinal matters. The supposed abrogation of Scripture by Jesus (for example in the Sermon on the Mount), which makes Jesus contradict himself, is based on a misunderstanding of the passages in question.

CHRIST'S VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

John W. Wenham

THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICITY

In some circles it would be necessary in the present theological climate to ask the question, Is it possible to gain any solid knowledge of the teaching of Jesus? Has not the teaching of Jesus become so overlaid by the theologizings and the pious storytelling of the early Christians as to be past recovery? The depth of contemporary skepticism was brought home to me the other day when I was browsing through the books on New Testament theology in a theological college library. I could find abundant material on the theology of Paul, Matthew, Luke, Q, or the fourth gospel, but when I looked for any substantial treatment of the teaching of Jesus, there was almost nothing of recent vintage. In some circles one simply does not presume to know what Jesus taught.

Broadly speaking, there are three positions which it is possible to take with regard to the gospels: (1) That they are sound records of history, vetted and approved by members of the apostolic body, and received as such by the leaders of the churches founded by them. This was the traditional, "catholic" position, and it remained the standard position of mainstream Christianity until the end of the nineteenth century. (2) That they are a mixture of the historical and the unhistorical. This was the position of nineteenth century liberalism, which remains very influential up to the present time. (3) That all the gospels are so slanted theologically, and so much the product of early Christian imagination, that they should not be regarded as a source of information about Jesus, but only about the early church.

I regard the skepticism of the last position as a *reductio ad absurdum*. We need a Jesus like the Jesus of the gospels to explain the emergence of the church. Without such a Jesus, it is impossible to understand how the church came into being and how it succeeded in creating the sublime figure portrayed for us by the four evangelists. The modern growth of a non-historical view of the gospels is akin to the growth of gnostic views of the gospels in the second century. Gnosticism gained great influence, especially among the intellectuals, but it was decisively rejected by the church as being an innovation, contrary to the teaching handed down in the churches founded by the apostles.

This view may seem remote from the inerrancy debate among conservative evangelical Christians, but in fact it is more relevant than first appears. For once the notion grasps the mind that the fourth gospel or the synoptic gospels (or for that matter the Pentateuch) were never *intended* to be taken as history, then even an evangelical Christian may feel driven to the belief that the most truly *biblical* position is a radical one. After all, is he not

being true to the original and intended meaning of Scripture in saying that the evangelists wrote theology and not history, and that the infancy narratives and the miracle stories and the "discrepant" resurrection accounts should not be taken literally?¹ It is thus possible to adopt the most extreme critical positions and to claim to be utterly true to the Bible. We need, therefore, to be on our guard as to where an uncritical acceptance of biblical criticism may lead us. So it is important to us to continue to take the Scriptures as the primitive and historic church took them and understood them.²

But the debate among evangelicals is more obviously concerned with positions (a) and (b). We all have a whole-hearted commitment to the incarnation of God the Son and a whole-hearted commitment to a miraculous element in the gospels, but some among us doubt whether sound historical method may not require us to sift at least a certain amount of unhistorical matter out of these narratives. A not uncommon stance is to assume that everything in the gospels is true until such time as it is proved false. Scholars who adopt this position will inevitably differ greatly in what they think constitutes proof, but for all of them there will be, happily, abundant evidence on which to determine our Lord's view of the Old Testament. Even for those who consider many of the gospel references to be doubtful, there is still plenty of evidence to go on. Indeed, it is probably true to say that if we cannot know Jesus' teaching about this, we cannot know his teaching about anything.

We are not going to assume at this stage of the argument that all the gospel material is good history, less still that it is all inerrant; merely that it is good enough to give us a clear view of Jesus' attitude to Scripture. But I think it should be said that a fully satisfying apologetic should eventually reach the stage where the inter-relations between the gospels are understood and a clear rationale can be seen for the likenesses and differences between them. There is at this time a flux in New Testament scholarship on the synoptic problem greater perhaps than at any time since the dawn of the critical era. It is much to be desired that evangelical scholars should be in the forefront of the great re-think that is going on. My own view is that present-day scholars (including evangelicals) have tended to date the gospels far too late,³ but I am not sanguine enough to consider it likely that we shall convert the scholarly world to a completely new standpoint quickly or easily. However desirable such a conversion might be as a long-term objective, it is not necessary for our argument to take any particular view of the gospels.⁴

¹This notion is, I believe, quite foundationless. There seems to be no evidence that the early church knew of this supposed intention by the evangelists not to write history--and the early Christians were in the best position to know. They rightly rejected the peculiar tenets of gnosticism as being untrue to apostolic tradition.

²On Radical Criticism of the Gospels, see further Additional Note p. 1.24; on higher criticism in general see Paper No. 5.

³I resist the temptation to develop this point beyond a cryptic footnote. My own undogmatic view is that Matthew was written in Hebrew or Aramaic between A.D. 33 and 42, Mark in about 44 followed shortly after by a Greek translation of Matthew, Luke in the early 50's, and John in the early 60's.

⁴Much of what follows is taken from chapter I of the author's *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973).

Our procedure will be to extract evidence for Jesus' view of the Old Testament from all the gospels without discrimination. This is *not* (we re-emphasize) to prejudge the question as to whether everything in the gospels is accurate; we recognize that, for some, certain parts of the gospels have less value as historical evidence than others. Provided that we avoid an almost total skepticism with regard to the gospels, we can at this stage of the argument allow a great variety of critical conclusions. What one critic will allow and another refuse is usually heavily influenced either by subjective considerations or by the exigencies of some hypothesis for which there is no demonstrative evidence. To embark upon a critical discussion of each passage would be likely to prove as inconclusive as it was laborious. All we ask is that the reader should accept the truth of the gospel picture in general outline.

If it turns out that this approach produces a consistent view of Christ, that in itself will tend to confirm the belief that the gospels are presenting a figure of history, and that the Jesus they depict is not (as radical critics maintain) the creation of diverse minds from a diverse and scattered community. But the reader can, if he wishes, make his own subtractions according to the best of his critical judgment as he goes along; but we think that, using fair methods, such subtractions will not affect the final result until the gospel picture of Christ has been reduced to that of a ghost. Even then the result will not be contrary to our conclusions; it will merely be uncertain through lack of evidence.

When we turn to the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the gospels, we have a wealth of relevant material coming from all four gospels and from all the four major strata of the synoptic gospels: Mark, the material peculiar to Matthew, the material peculiar to Luke, and the material common to Matthew and Luke (usually called "Q"). We are not confined simply to two or three key statements, but we have a host of quotations and allusions thrown up spontaneously from a great variety of situations, and these are often the more telling for revealing his basic assumptions rather than his specific teachings. We can hear Christ preaching to the multitude and instructing disciples, refuting opponents and answering enquirers; we can hear him in his private conflict with the tempter at the beginning of the ministry and in his final instructions prior to the ascension. As we proceed it will become clear that, throughout the whole range of the material, his attitude is unchanging. We shall examine in turn his attitude to the truth of the history, to the authority of the teaching, and to the inspiration of the writing. As the evidence is assembled, it will lead us to a firm and objective historical conclusion. We shall see that to Christ the Old Testament was true, authoritative, inspired. To him the God of the Old Testament was the living God and the teaching of the Old Testament was the teaching of the living God. To him⁵ what Scripture said, God said.

⁵This echoes a sentence of B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Foundations* (London: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 58, which echoes an earlier sentence of Augustine, *Confessions*, xiii.

THE TRUTH OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

He consistently treats the historical narratives as straightforward records of fact. We have references to: Abel (Luke 11:51), Noah (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:26, 27), Abraham (John 8:56), the institution of circumcision (John 7:22; cf. Gen. 17:10-12; Lev. 12:3), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15; 11:23, 24; Luke 10:12), Lot (Luke 17:28-32), Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28), the manna (John 6:31, 49, 58), the wilderness serpent (John 3:14), David eating the shewbread (Matt. 12:3, 4; Mark 2:25, 26; Luke 6:3, 4) and as a psalm-writer (Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42), Solomon (Matt. 6:29; 12:42; Luke 11:31; 12:27), Elijah (Luke 4:25, 26), Elisha (Luke 4:27), Jonah (Matt. 12:39-41; Luke 11:29, 30, 32), Zechariah (Luke 11:51). This last passage brings out his sense of the unity of history and his grasp of its wide sweep. His eye surveys the whole course of history from "the foundation of the world" to "this generation." There are repeated references to Moses as the giver of the law (Matt. 8:4; 19:8; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:5; 12:26; Luke 5:14; 20:37; John 5:46, 7:19); the sufferings of the prophets are also mentioned frequently (Matt. 5:12; 13:57; 21:34-36; 23:29-37; Mark 6:4 (cf. Luke 4:24; John 4:44); 12:2-5; Luke 6:23; 11:47-51; 13:34; 20:10-12); and there is a reference to the popularity of the false prophets (Luke 6:26). He sets the stamp of his approval on passages in Genesis 1 and 2 (Matt. 19:4, 5; Mark 10:6-8).

Although these quotations are taken by our Lord more or less at random from different parts of the Old Testament and some periods of the history are covered more fully than others, it is evident that he was familiar with most of our Old Testament and that he treated it all equally as history. Curiously enough, the narratives that are least acceptable to the so-called "modern mind" are the very ones that he seemed most fond of choosing for his illustrations.

The Possibility of Non-Literal Interpretation

It is, of course, arguable that our Lord's use of the Old Testament stories does not of necessity imply that he regarded them all as unimpeachable history. It is perfectly possible to use avowed legends and allegories to illustrate spiritual truth. The stories of Ulysses and the Sirens or Christian and Doubting Castle may quite properly be used as illustrations of spiritual truth without implying a belief in their historicity. Nonetheless, despite this theoretical possibility, a review of the way in which our Lord in practice used these narratives seems decisively to forbid such a conclusion. In some of the passages quoted, while there is no evidence to suggest that our Lord understood them in any but a literal way, a literal meaning is not essential to the force of the passage. Seldom can a non-literal meaning be applied without some loss of vividness and effectiveness, but there would be no essential loss in meaning if the injunction "offer . . . what Moses commanded" (Mark 1:44; cf. Matt. 8:4; Luke 5:14) were to be read "offer the things which the law of Moses commands;" or if for "Moses said, Honor your father . . ." (Mark 7:10) we were to read "The law of Moses says, Honor your father. . . ." The reference to "Solomon in all his glory" would be as graphic of a legendary figure as of a historical one. The references to monogamy "from the beginning of creation" perhaps do not necessitate a literal

interpretation of chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis for their validity, though the subsequent reference to the changed situation under Moses seems really to require it (Mark 10:2ff.; cf. Matt. 19:3ff.).

There are a dozen other passages where an Old Testament story might arguably be taken in a non-literal sense,⁶ but as the matter is pursued the impression gains in strength that our Lord understood the Bible stories in a natural way and that his teaching should be taken quite straightforwardly. The impression is strongly reinforced when we come to a further collection of passages where the historical truth of the saying seems to be essential to its validity.

While hesitating to place great weight upon a single passage, it is difficult to deny that the words of T. T. Perowne on Matthew 12:41 are applicable to a number of passages made use of in the gospels. Jesus says, "The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." Perowne comments:

Is it possible to understand a reference like this on the non-historic theory of the book of Jonah? The future Judge is speaking words of solemn warning to those who shall hereafter stand convicted at his bar. Intensely real he would make the scene in anticipation to them, as it was real, as if then present, to himself. And yet we are to suppose him to say that imaginary persons who at the imaginary preaching of an imaginary prophet repented in imagination, shall rise up in that day and condemn the actual impenitence of those his actual hearers.⁷

There is, of course, a non-literal element here, as in all portrayals of the world to come. This rising up on the day of judgment is not presumably to be pictured literally as individuals standing up to make accusation at the Great Assize. The rising up is the resurrection itself. The resurrection to life of the penitent Ninevites is itself the witness against our Lord's impenitent hearers. It might not be impossible to take this as an illustration from a current folk tale, yet it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this and several other passages are deprived of their force if their historical basis is removed, and in all honesty there seems no hint that our Lord intended anything of the sort. This conclusion is reinforced by the immediate juxtaposition in this passage (Matt. 12:42) of the visit of the Queen of the South as a strictly parallel illustration. To regard the book of Jonah as intentional parable, or allegory, or historical fiction may be plausible enough; but not the book of Kings.

⁶These are discussed in the author's *Our Lord's View of the Old Testament* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 11-14.

⁷T. T. Perowne, *Obadiah and Jonah* (Cambridge, 1894), p. 51. The book of Jonah is further discussed in *Christ and the Bible* on pp. 74f.

"As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matt. 24:37) is very similar. The context is most solemn. Our Lord has introduced his statement with the tremendous assertion, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." Then, drawing a vivid picture of the everyday life of those who lived in the days before the flood, he says: "so will be the coming of the Son of man." It is quite true that a popular preacher may play upon the emotions of his hearers by painting a graphic and moving picture of scenes which are avowedly fictitious, and if he should round off such an account with a dramatic "And the same will happen to you!", it might be very powerful. But it is in fact an oratorical device to arouse the imagination which adds nothing to the argument. Here our Lord is building up a solemn warning by appealing to the dreadful acts of God recorded in Holy Scripture, which both he and his hearers know to be of divine authority. To Capernaum he uttered a warning based on another terrible act of judgment. "For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you" (Matt. 11:23, 24). Since Noah's flood and the destruction of Sodom are taken as historical in these passages, the same must apply to Luke 17:26-32, which ends with "Remember Lot's wife." Again, with encouragements and warnings about more immediate coming events, historical happenings of the past are used as a foundation for future expectations. Looking over the whole sweep of biblical history from the first book of the Hebrew Canon to the last, he says, "that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it shall be required of this generation" (Luke 11:50ff.). The issue of Old Testament history was to find its fearful consummation in the events of A.D. 70. And it was the divine aid given to the persecuted prophets in earlier times that was to be the stay of persecuted disciples. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12).

When our Lord said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day . . . Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:56ff.), they took up stones to cast at him. But if Abraham and the messianic promise were not historical, these sayings were in fact meaningless. At Nazareth "they . . . were filled with wrath . . . and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong" (Luke 4:28, 29). But his offending remarks about the commission of Elijah to Sidon and of Elisha to Syria (Luke 4:25-27) had no validity unless these things really happened.

THE AUTHORITY OF OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING

Pharisees and Sadducees

Our Lord uses the Old Testament as the court of appeal in matters of controversy. Alike with Pharisee and Sadducee he does not call into question their

appeal to Scripture; rather he rebukes them for their failure to study it sufficiently profoundly. Even the seemingly wasteful expenditure of time and effort by the Pharisees on detailed legal formulation that resulted from their study of the Torah he commends rather than condemns. "These you ought to have done," he says. Their mistake was not that they applied the law too rigorously, but that they have left undone the weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23). Matthew gives two most remarkable instances of this teaching--so remarkable that it is unlikely that the sayings were invented, particularly after Gentiles had gained full recognition in the church. The first is the passage which precedes the "It was said to the men of old . . . but I say to you . . ." section of the Sermon on the Mount:

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-20).

Jesus taught his disciples the need for obedience to the law, first and foremost in spirit, but also in letter.

The second passage is even more remarkable: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice" (Matt. 23:2, 3). To Jesus, scribal lore was valuable if linked with spiritual understanding: "every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matt. 13:52). There is no hint of a belittling of Old Testament teaching. Rightly understood that teaching was the "Word" and "Commandment" of God. Willful, spiritual obtuseness and the displacement of Scripture by "tradition" (mere "precepts of men") were the twin evils which made that Word of none effect (Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13). Compare John 5:39-47, where the Jews who did not believe, who would not come to Jesus for life, who had not the love of God in them, are shown to have searched the Scriptures in vain. They had set their hope on Moses, but Moses himself proved to be their accuser. They did not really in their hearts believe him--hence their unbelief toward Jesus. "For," he said, "he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (verses 46, 47). Faith, love, and a right attitude of will are the keys to an understanding of Moses and of Christ.

The Sadducees escape no more lightly. Their supposed rationality is met by the fierce and scathing denunciation, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29; cf. Mark 12:24). Jesus had not been content with the knowledge of the letter of Scripture

shown by the Pharisees and had been concerned that there should be genuine spiritual understanding. But in speaking to the Sadducees he makes it plain that such understanding does not come by a study of Scripture enlightened only by a human reason; it comes through a knowledge of the Scriptures which has been illuminated by the power of God. He concludes his answer to the problem of the future state of the much married lady by a further appeal to the Bible: "Have you not read what was said to you by God, I am the God of Abraham . . . ?" (Matt. 22:31, 32; cf. Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37).

The Right Use of Reason

Jesus condemns neither minuteness of study nor the exercise of reason. His condemnation comes when the wickedness of men so perverts their reason or their methods of study that they become blind to the inner principles of the divine revelation. He himself knew how to stimulate the exercise of reason and repeatedly he encouraged his hearers to go beneath the externals of Scripture language and think out its underlying principles. This comes out clearly in his exposition of "You shall not kill" and "You shall not commit adultery." It is also most powerfully displayed in his two quotations of Hosea's "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13; 12:7). In two quite different contexts, neither of which has any direct reference to sacrifice (one relating to his practice of consorting with tax-collectors and the other to sabbath-observance), he rebukes the Pharisees for failure to grasp the implication of Hosea's words. He demands more thought, not less; but it must be thought conducted in a humble and teachable spirit directed by God himself. This need for divine instruction is brought out in John 6:45, where he refers to the Old Testament itself as already looking forward to such a God-given spiritual illumination. He quotes Isaiah 54:13, which says, "All your sons shall be taught by the Lord." He requires that study and thought be applied to the records objectively given, but this study must be conducted under the subjective influence of him who gave them.

A Guide to Ethics

We see the same conclusion arising out of his use of the Old Testament as a guide in matters of ethics. The Old Testament provides objective moral standards which demand the obedience of our inmost hearts. The answer to the young man who inquired how to gain eternal life is given in the form of a series of quotations from the Ten Commandments, together with the injunction from Leviticus, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:18, 19; cf. Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20).

When the lawyer asked the question, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus replied with two quotations from the Pentateuch: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." To him these two quotations sum up the teaching of the Old Testament. "On these two commandments," he says, "depend all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40; cf. Mark 12:29-31).

Note carefully that to our Lord these two commandments sum up, not the New Testament, but the Old. Many people think that these two commandments are the heart of the New Testament, forgetting that they stand in the law of Moses, dating back centuries before the time of Christ. According to our Lord they are the heart of the Old Testament. Or, to be more precise, they are the heart of the Old Testament law. There is no higher law than the Old Testament law as here expressed, and never can be. The New Testament does not reveal a higher *Law*: it reveals the gospel. The demands of God's law had proved far beyond the reach of sinful men and it had brought only condemnation. The gospel was good news of salvation to the helpless and the condemned. It is extraordinary what a hold this utterly unbiblical notion of the contrariety of the two Testaments has obtained. We have had so much erroneous teaching for so many years that even intelligent people often really believe that the two Testaments represent two irreconcilably opposed points of view; the Old Testament God being a God of wrath and the New Testament God a God of love. Such a view would have been repudiated by our Lord and by every New Testament writer with horror. To them the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are the same; in both he is a God of wrath and of love. The great difference between the Old and New Testament is that in the former the gospel (though by no means invisible) is veiled, whereas in the latter it is clearly revealed.

Thus, "On these two (Old Testament) commandments," he says, "depend all the law and the prophets."

In passing, it is perhaps worthwhile to point out that here--as also in the Golden Rule ("Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them:" Matt. 7:12), of which he says, "this is the law and the prophets"--he sets his seal upon the sacred writings considered as a unitary whole.⁸ Also the summary itself brings home forcibly the fact that within the Old Testament all its elements are not equally fundamental. Laws are of necessity of social life, but cases often arise where the law gives no specific ruling. He makes it clear that in such cases guidance is to be found, not in a multiplication of casuistical rules, but by appealing from the less fundamental principle to the more fundamental. In other words, he is simply saying once again that the mind of God is to be found by a spiritually-minded approach to the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the court of appeal, but their study must be prompted by a love for God and man.

G. Vos describes Jesus' treatment of the law like this:

He once more made the voice of the law the voice of the living God, who is present in every commandment, so absolute in his demands, so personally interested in

⁸"The law" or "the law and the prophets" often seems to be shorthand for "the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings," the three sections of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Psalms, which occupy a great place in the thoughts of Jesus, belong to the Writings. In quoting Ps. 82:6 he says: "Is it not written in your *Law*?" (John 10:34). "The Writings" did not become the universally accepted title of the third section of the Old Testament Canon until much later. See further, *Christ and the Bible*, p. 158 n. 3.

man's conduct, so all-observant, that the thought of yielding to him less than the whole inner life, the heart, the soul, the mind, the strength, can no longer be tolerated. Thus quickened by the spirit of God's personality, the law becomes in our Lord's hands a living organism, in which soul and body, spirit and letter, the greater and smaller commandments are to be distinguished, and which admits of being reduced to great comprehensive principles in whose light the weight and purport of all single precepts are to be intelligently appreciated.⁹

Accommodations to the Beliefs of His Hearers

The use of Scripture as a court of appeal in controversy is undoubted, but it suggests the possibility that Jesus is simply taking his contemporaries on their own ground without committing himself to the correctness of their premises. In other words, that we have *ad hominem* arguments, aimed more at discrediting his opponents than laying foundations on which to build eternal truth. Indeed may we not go even further, and suggest that (since his aim was the positive one of leading his contemporaries forward from their valuable, though imperfect, Old Testament conceptions of the character of God) he deliberately refrained from unsettling them by questioning their conception of the inspiration of their Scriptures, allowing the gentler processes of passing time gradually to bring home to them the imperfect character of what they had hitherto revered?

Plausible though this is, it seems impossible to accept it as being Christ's real view. In other respects he does not show himself unduly sensitive about undermining current beliefs. He is not slow to denounce pharisaic traditionalism; in the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, he carefully distinguishes between the divine law and later false deductions; on another occasion he honors the scribes and Pharisees who "sit on Moses' seat" upholding the law of God, yet rebukes them for binding "heavy burdens, hard to bear" (Matt. 23:2-4). He is not slow to repudiate nationalist conceptions of Messiahship. He is prepared to face the cross for defying current misconceptions. Surely he would have been prepared to explain clearly the mingling of divine truth and human error in the Bible, if he had known such to exist. The notion that our Lord was fully aware that the view of Holy Scripture current in his day was erroneous, and that he deliberately accommodated his teaching to the beliefs of his hearers,¹⁰ will not square with the facts. His use of the Old Testament seems altogether too insistent and positive and extreme. What (according to the gospel records) he actually says is that the "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35); "Not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law" (Matt. 5:18); "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to become void" (Luke 16:17). There is a

⁹G. Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1951), pp. 61ff.

¹⁰H. R. Boer, *Above the Battle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) p. 95 says "Jesus again and again accommodated himself to existing beliefs which we no longer accept."

tremendous moral earnestness when he says to the Pharisees, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men' . . . You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! . . . making void the word of God" (Mark 7:6-13). It is no mere debating point that makes him say to the Sadducees, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). When speaking of the irretrievable separation in the after-world, he puts into the mouth of Abraham these words, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them . . . If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:29-31). As we have already seen, when he quotes instances of the fearful judgments of God, he does so to bring home the seriousness of contemporary issues.

The Temptation

The suggestion that his use of the Old Testament is of an *ad hominem* nature breaks down most obviously in the account of the temptation. There he introduces each of his three answers by the decisive formula, "It is written" (Matt. 4:4ff.; Luke 4:4ff.). Are we asked to believe that the *homo* here concerned would be content to submit to rebuttal by an argument based on a false premise? Whether the devil is regarded as personal or impersonal, it is equally clear that Jesus understood "It is written" to be equivalent to "God says." There is a grand and solid objectivity about the perfect tense γέγραπται, "it stands written": "here is the permanent, unchangeable witness of the Eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction." Such it appears to have been to Jesus' inmost soul, quite apart from the convenience of the standpoint to him in controversy. In the hour of utmost crisis and at the moment of death words of Scripture come to his lips: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1; Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34); "Into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Ps. 31:5; Luke 23:46).

Post-Resurrection Teaching

Any lingering doubts that we might have as to the fundamental importance of the Old Testament to Jesus are dispelled by a consideration of his post-resurrection teaching. Between his resurrection and ascension Jesus transcended human limitations very much more obviously than before, and then, if at any time during his earthly ministry, we must believe that he had access to the mind of God. During the post-resurrection period he gave his final instructions to the leaders of the embryo church and emphasized again to their rapidly developing understanding the fundamentals on which the church was to be built. It would appear from Luke's account that the main burden of this teaching was an exposition of the Old Testament. Tracing through "all the Scriptures," "beginning with Moses and all the prophets," he showed from each of the three collections of sacred writings--the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms--how they were fulfilled in him (Luke 24:25-47). At first it seems tantalizing that Luke should speak of these expositions only in general terms, when a detailed account of our Lord's teaching would have proved so interesting to us; but is it not probable that Luke has preserved the main ingredients of his teaching--not in the gospel, but in

Acts? In the earliest years of the church its members were almost all Jews and its message was being presented almost entirely to Jews, with the result that their chief preoccupation was to demonstrate that the Old Testament found its true fulfillment in Jesus. The outline of their apologetic would have been derived from what they had learned from their risen Master.¹¹ Thus the general apostolic use of Scripture, and particularly the records of the early chapters of Acts, must be regarded as important witnesses to our Lord's own teaching. As we shall see later, the teaching of the New Testament writers underlines that of Christ.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS

Our Lord not only believed the truth of the Old Testament history, and used the Scriptures as the final authority in matters of faith and conduct, he also regarded the writings themselves as inspired. To him, Moses, the prophets, David, and the other Scripture-writers were truly inspired men with a message given by the Spirit of God; but there is no trace of the modern idea that the men were inspired but not the writings. Rather, if anything, might one infer the reverse. The Old Testament makes no attempt to gloss over the sins of its saints. The greatest of them, such as Moses and David, are convicted of grievous sin, and our Lord would have had no desire to whitewash their characters. But their *writings* come in a different category.

Their writings are authoritative. This, however, is not by reason of the authority of the human author, but because God is regarded as the ultimate author. The authors are real authors--there is no idea of a mechanical dictation--yet nonetheless it was God's Spirit who was speaking through them, and it is the divine authorship which gives them their importance. Our Lord can preface a quotation of Scripture by "Moses said" (Mark 7:10), "Well did Isaiah prophesy" (Mark 7:6; cf. Matt. 13:14), "David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36); he can refer to the abomination of desolation, "which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet" (Matt. 24:15, RV m). But, as is clear from the context, the injunctions "Honor your father and your mother" and "He that speaketh evil of father or mother, let him die the death" do not derive their authority from the fact that Moses uttered them, but because they are commandments of God. Without the original "God spake these words" or "The Lord said unto Moses," the expression "Moses said" would have had no force. The words of Isaiah and Daniel likewise gain their authority because they are prophets, the essence of prophecy being that the prophet speaks God's words, or (more vividly) God speaks *through* the prophet. David (who, incidentally, is actually called a "prophet" in the very first Christian address delivered after the ascension--Acts 2:30) is expressly said by our Lord to have spoken "in the Holy Spirit."

James Barr, in an interesting passage,¹² takes "fundamentalists" to task for using the authority of Jesus to decide questions of biblical criticism. They

¹¹C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Fontana, 1952), pp. 109 f.

¹²J. Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 73ff.

seem to think, he says, "that Jesus is placing all his personal and spiritual authority in support of the thesis that there was a historical Jonah who was factually within the whale;" "that Jesus is personally guaranteeing that the Psalm was historically written by the original David;" and that "the historical Jesus is staking his whole authority and credibility as a teacher upon the assertion that the passage referred to was actually spoken by a historical Daniel." He continues: "Its distortion of the proper proportions of the Christian faith is extreme . . . [it is] a simple literary function-mistake. The entirety of utterances ascribed to Jesus is treated as 'teaching;' and no adequate distinction is drawn between that which Jesus seeks to teach . . . and any or all of the elements which are found in his utterance." In illustration he quotes John Huxtable, who says that if an absent-minded professor tells me the wrong time of a train, I do not regard him as a liar or any less reputable as a scholar. I "do not suppose that being a great authority on Homer makes him a reliable substitute for a timetable . . . Jesus Christ came into the world to be its Savior, not an authority on biblical criticism."

Barr is right in thus stressing the importance of keeping the Christian faith in its proper proportions, for it was Jesus himself who distinguished between "great" commandments and the "least" of commandments, and urged obedience to both. There are similarly greater and lesser true utterances made by the Holy Spirit. It is exaggerated language to talk about Jesus "staking his whole authority and credibility" upon an incidental historical reference, but it is nonetheless a natural assumption that *God's* words should be regarded as true in matters small as well as great. God is not like an absent-minded professor. It was part of the Lord's Saviorhood that he spoke words of life and truth which were to be implicitly trusted and obeyed if his followers were to build on rock. We must be wary of dogmatism in pushing the words of Jesus beyond their natural sense, but we are right to take his guidance in understanding the Old Testament in historical minutiae as well as in its great theological truths.

Fulfillment of Prophecy

Our Lord's references to the necessity for the fulfillment of the prophecies of Scripture are numerous. It is not always easy to discern the principles of interpretation which govern our Lord's understanding of prophecy, prophecies being sometimes interpreted literally and sometimes typologically. But these exegetical problems¹³ serve only to throw into stronger relief the implied God-giveness of the whole body of prophetic writings which by divine necessity must be fulfilled. The fact that the correspondence between prophecy and fulfillment is by no means obvious on the surface makes the conviction that these ancient writings contain the foreshadowing of present events the more remarkable. Our Lord not only sees the fulfillment of prophecy in events that have already taken place, but he is possessed of a sense of divine predestination in the events that lie ahead. These things must assuredly come to pass in order that the Scriptures may be fulfilled.

¹³See *Christ and the Bible*, pp. 100ff. For a full treatment see R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of the Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (London: Tyndale, 1971).

Here are the more important references to his teaching about the fulfillment of prophecy: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). "This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face . . .'" (Matt. 11:10; cf. Luke 7:27). "Elijah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him" (Mark 9:12, 13). "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, . . . they will scourge and kill him, and on the third day he will rise" (Luke 18:31-33). "These are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written" (Luke 21:22). "The Son of man goes as it is written of him, . . ." (Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:21). "For I tell you, that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors;' for what is written about me has its fulfillment" (Luke 22:37). "You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd . . .'" (Matt. 26:31; cf. Mark 14:27; Zech. 13:7). "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so? . . . all this has taken place, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matt. 26:53-56; cf. Mark 14:49). "'O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27). "'These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem'" (Luke 24:44-47). "The Scriptures . . . bear witness to me; . . . If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:39-47). "I am not speaking of you all; I know whom I have chosen; it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread had lifted his heel against me'" (John 13:18; Ps. 41:9). "It is to fulfill the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause'" (John 15:25; Ps. 35:19). "None of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12). Our Lord's acceptance of the divine character of the prophetic Scriptures is clear and full and emphatic.

"Scripture" and Verbal Inspiration

Though in any balanced statement of the doctrine of biblical inspiration it is most important to remember how our Lord acknowledged the real authorship of the human writers, yet it is also important to note carefully that his references to human authorship are quite secondary. Often he is content to speak simply of "Scripture," God being the implied author. Here are some of the references: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing . . ."

(Luke 4:21). "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected . . .?'" (Matt. 21:42; cf. Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Ps. 118:22). "How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (Matt. 26:54). "The Scriptures . . . bear witness to me" (John 5:39). "He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said . . ." (John 7:38).

"The Scriptures" collectively state, and each individual "Scripture" states, the teaching of God. Similarly, for him to say (as he does in so many other places) "Have you not read . . .?" is equivalent to "Do you not know that God has said . . .?" (cf. Matt. 12:3; 19:4; 21:16; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3). The same force is to be given to the word γέγραπται, "It is written," already mentioned in connection with the temptations, but used often at other times (Matt. 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; Mark 9:12, 13; 11:17; 14:21, 27; Luke 7:27; 19:46). The inspiration implied by these phrases is not applied only to oracular prophetic utterances but to all parts of Scripture without discrimination--to history, to laws, to psalms, to prophecies.

This witness of our Lord to the inspiration of the writings demands specially careful attention, because, wittingly or unwittingly, it is continually being contradicted by Christian writers. It often takes the form of a repudiation of the whole notion of verbal inspiration as obviously outmoded, or even of a denial that in a formal sense there is any difference between the inspiration of the Bible and other great literature. A doctrine of verbal inspiration plainly needs careful statement, but that some sort of verbal inspiration is taught by Christ is clear, seeing that it is to the writings rather than to the writers that he ascribes authority. Writings are made up of words, therefore there must be some form of word-inspiration. Scripture is Scripture to Christ because it has (in a way which other writing has not) God as its primary author.

Interchangeability of "Scripture" and "God"

One further point of extreme interest gives a final illustration of this notion of the divine character of Scripture. It arises from the remarkable interchangeability of the terms "God" and "Scripture" in certain New Testament passages. We find cases where "Scripture" is used when one would expect "God," and "God" is used when one would expect "Scripture."¹⁴ Romans 9:17 reads, "The Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you.'" This means simply, "In the Scripture narrative, God says to Pharaoh . . .", but "Scripture" has been personalized and allowed to replace "God." Similarly in Galatians 3:8 it says, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham." There is one instance of Jesus doing the same thing, though in the reverse direction. In Matthew 19:4, 5, an Old Testament sentence, which in its context is not a

¹⁴This is an example of metonymy, a figure of speech in which "the writer" may be put for "the thing written" or "the thing written" for "the writer." (Thus "Shakespeare says" could be used to mean "the works of Shakespeare say," or "Hamlet says" could be used to mean "Shakespeare, as he expresses his mind in *Hamlet*, says.")

statement by God, is referred directly to God as its author. Our Lord says, "He who made them . . . said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother.'" The quotation is from Genesis 2:24, which in the context is not a statement attributed to God but is simply a comment introduced into the course of the narrative by the writer of Genesis. The natural use would be, "Scripture said, For this reason . . .", but the actual use is, "He which made them (*i.e.* God) said . . ." So truly is God regarded as the author of scriptural statements that in certain contexts "God" and "Scripture" have become interchangeable. Jesus never exalts the Scriptures for their own sake, yet he never allows a wedge to be driven between the Scriptures and the message of Scripture. What Scripture says is the word of God--God is its author. Thus to our Lord the Old Testament is true as to its history, it is of divine authority, and its very writings are inspired by God Himself.

In recent years there has been a serious attempt to distinguish between infallibility and inerrancy, and to attribute belief in the first to Jesus but not the second. Infallibility is taken to mean that Scripture is authoritative and factually true in all matters "crucially relevant to Christian faith and practice,"¹⁵ but not in peripheral matters. The trouble is that this sort of distinction is nowhere to be found in Jesus' teaching, and it seems to be precluded by his double testimony both to the unqualified historical truth of the Old Testament and to the unqualified inspiration of the writing. The jots and tittles come from God whether in matters of doctrine or ethics or history or prophecy. Our Lord received the Old Testament--the books of Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Jonah, and the rest--in the way the Jewish church of his day received it, as inspired in its whole and in its parts. The attempt to discriminate between the crucial and the peripheral appears to have been a novelty of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

ALLUSIONS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

We have now covered the ground sufficiently to give a clear idea of our Lord's view of Scripture, but the citation of a number of outstanding references cannot of itself convey the full weight of the evidence, for there must be added the many allusions which slip out in the course of his teaching. The Sermon on the Mount, for instance, has few explicit quotations, but it is so encrusted with Old Testament language and ideas that it is impossible to say which is conscious allusion and which is not. There is a shading off from conscious allusion to the adoption of Old Testament word- and thought-forms, which makes classification impossible, and which shows how the Holy Scriptures had penetrated the warp and woof of Christ's mind. It would take too long to examine the vast number of references in his teachings one by one, and the further evidence is not required to prove a case already adequately established, but it is perhaps worthwhile just to mention a few of the more interesting allusions.

¹⁵S. T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible: Inerrancy Versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), p. 118.

There are three peculiar to Mark. "He puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:29) recalls Joel 3:13; "having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" (Mark 8:18) is from Jeremiah 5:21; and "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48) is from Isaiah 66:24. In the Sermon on the Mount, the phrase "the pure in heart" and the sentence "the meek shall inherit the earth" are not original to Jesus, but come from the Old Testament (Pss. 73:1; 37:11). "Depart from me, you evil-doers" (Matt. 7:23; cf. Luke 13:27) is Psalm 6:8. "Children will rise up against parents . . ." (Matt. 10:21, 35; Mark 13:12; cf. Luke 12:53) is Micah 7:6. In Matthew 18:15-20, we have one of our Lord's very rare items of ecclesiastical legislation: the sentence "that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses" comes from Deuteronomy 19:15. The parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16) recalls Isaiah 5. The Mount of Olives discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) is full of Old Testament language. Luke 19:44, "(they shall) dash you to the ground, you and your children within you" echoes that fiercest of imprecatory psalms, Psalm 137.

The total impression that these and many other allusions in the gospels give is that the mind of Christ is saturated with the Old Testament and that, as he speaks, there flows out perfectly naturally a complete range of uses varying from direct verbal quotation to an unconscious utilization of scraps of Old Testament phraseology. There is no trace of an artificial quotation of Scripture as a matter of pious habit, but his mind is so steeped in both the words and principles of Scripture that quotation and allusion spring to his lips naturally and appositely in all sorts of different circumstances.

OBJECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

But is there not another side to this question? Did not our Lord at times qualify or even abrogate some of the Old Testament teaching? Did he not on various occasions treat the Scriptures in a much freer way than this summary would suggest--in a way that revealed a quietly critical element in his approach to them? J. K. S. Reid, for instance, says: "There is a class of sayings (or actions) in which he improves upon what is written in the Scripture he knew, and another where he endorses what is there."¹⁶ B. H. Branscomb says: "He flatly rejected a portion of it by appealing to another portion."¹⁷

There are four main examples of our Lord's teaching that have been used to illustrate the thesis that he criticized, and so by implication repudiated, parts of the Old Testament. To deal with the three of lesser importance first.

The Sabbath

Our Lord said, "The Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28; cf. Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5). This hardly seems to merit comment, because it

¹⁶J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture* (London: Harper, 1957), pp. 260f.

¹⁷B. H. Branscomb, *Jesus and the Law of Moses* (London: Harper, 1930), p. 155.

so obviously cannot seriously be used to illustrate a lower view of the Old Testament. The Pharisees had objected to the rubbing of the ears of corn. Quite the reverse of appealing away from Scripture, our Lord answers them by an appeal to Bible history, reminding them of what David did. He repudiates the petty traditions of the elders in favor of a sane and spiritually-minded attention to the Old Testament. The passage is indeed significant, not for its lowered view of Scripture, but for the height of our Lord's claims implied in it. It was God who gave the Sabbath law, and Jesus claimed to possess God's authority to define the limitations of that law.

Sacrifice

Our Lord's twofold citation of Hosea 6:6:¹⁸ "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice," has been used as an example of his critical approach to the Old Testament in setting aside most important elements of Jewish ceremonial. It is very doubtful whether Hosea's own words or our Lord's quotation of them contained or conveyed to those who heard them any idea of a literal abrogation of sacrifice. Certainly the gospel contexts suggest nothing of the kind, and such thoughts do not appear to have been seriously entertained by the apostles until some years after the ascension. At least they did not take their Master seriously or literally enough to abandon the sacrificial worship in Jerusalem. The biblical writers are by no means as literal as we normally are, and yet we should not misunderstand an impassioned clergyman who said: "I want your spiritual devotion, not your money." We should not necessarily expect to see church collections suddenly disappear! But even if we take it entirely literally, it has still proved nothing at all. No Christian, not even the Seventh Day Adventist, believes that the Mosaic sacrificial system is now binding; yet the whole Christian church for many centuries held the view that the Mosaic injunctions were truly given by God, but that many of them were temporary, until such time as they had been fulfilled in Christ. For the Son of God to abrogate a law of God is by no means to deny that it was first enacted by God.

"Cleansing All Foods"

Mark 7:18, 19: "Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters, not his heart but his stomach, and so passes on? (Thus he declared all foods clean.)" This has been used similarly as showing our Lord's abrogation of the distinction between clean and unclean animals. But if the apostle Peter, after his vision of the great sheet let down from heaven (Acts 10:9-16), looked back and saw in this saying an implicit, earlier abrogation of the distinction between clean and unclean foods, it involves no denial of the divine origin of the law that is now repealed. Indeed the context points precisely the other way. Mark 7:1-13, which immediately precedes, is a devastating attack on those who leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

"But I Say to You . . ."

Of primary importance is the famous section of the Sermon on the Mount in which our Lord's sayings are contrasted with what was said to them of old time (Matt. 5:17-48). Christ used the language of loftiest authority, "It was said . . . but I say . . ." This passage is often construed by superficial readers as being a repudiation of the "barbarous" ethic of the Old Testament and a replacement of it by a contrasted Christian ethic. It is suggested that Christ was declaring the teaching of the Old Testament to be fundamentally wrong and was putting a new and true doctrine in its place. If this were a correct interpretation it would be remarkable enough as a claim to authority as a teacher, but in fact it is quite mistaken. He made, if possible, an even higher claim. He deliberately set the Old Testament on the highest pinnacle of authority and then proceeded to set himself above it. He introduced the passage with the words: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

It has been a common practice to find two sources for the Sermon on the Mount: the first (as quoted above) accepts the strict rabbinical doctrine of Scripture, and the second ("but I say to you") overthrows it. There is an intrinsic absurdity about combining two contradictory sources in this way, but as D. Daube has shown, the sequence of *principle* ("think not that I have come to abolish") and *cases* ("you have heard") is very common in Rabbinic literature. "To fulfill"--*qiyym*, "to uphold"--the law, is "to show that the text is in agreement with your teaching." The test of any teaching is whether you can give full effect to, "uphold," every word of the law.¹⁹ So it is that, after the opening passage concerning the blessedness of discipleship, the very first truth which our Lord drives home is the authority of the Old Testament and the sermon virtually ends with "this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). It is rounded off with an earnest appeal to beware of false prophets and to build on Jesus' words.

What our Lord did was not to negate any of the Old Testament commands but to show their full scope and to strip off current misinterpretations of them. Our Lord evidently did not himself make it clear to his disciples that he intended the abrogation of Levitical sacrifices and all the paraphernalia of temple worship. It was left to Paul to bring into clear light the implications of his teaching and (even more important than his teaching) of his death and resurrection. It is certainly not to the Sermon on the Mount that we are to look for an abrogation of the Old Testament. Our Lord did not say, "The Old Testament says, You shall do no murder. I say, You may commit murder." What he did teach is that God does not restrict the commandment to the mere letter of the law, but that he disapproves of the hating spirit which leads to murder, and of lustful intentions which in God's sight are equivalent to adultery.

¹⁹D. Daube, *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone Press, 1956), pp. 60f.

Divorce

As his teaching on divorce (Matt. 5:31, 32; cf. 19:3ff.; Mark 10:2ff.; Luke 16:18) is often regarded as an instance of our Lord giving to an Old Testament passage something less than divine authority, it may be worthwhile making a short digression to clear up a common confusion. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 gives strict instructions that a wife, formally divorced and remarried, may on no account return to her former husband:

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord.

This is one of the statutes and ordinances which "the Lord your God commands you to do" (Deut. 26:16), and there is no good ground for thinking that either our Lord himself or his questioner, in referring this injunction to Moses, meant thereby to deny that it came from God. The question was what deductions might be drawn from it. It was currently interpreted as giving divine approval for divorce and was misquoted in the form given in Matthew 5:31: "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." But it is not a command to divorce; it is not properly a permission to divorce, since the divine pattern of Genesis 2:24, where the man "cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh," had never been modified; it is rather a disapproving recognition of the fact of divorce, with regulations to mitigate its worst evils. It is in the form: "If . . . and if . . . , then . . ." The law gave civil permission, but not moral permission for divorce.

There are two possible interpretations of our Lord's teaching on this matter, and neither of them denies the divine origin of the Mosaic command. Either, the "permission" for divorce was a law for the spiritually immature Israel and the revocation was a new law for the spiritually more mature church--that is, there were two different laws for two different sets of circumstances, and both were given by God. Or, the "permission" for divorce was a *law*--a law of Israel's statute-book, designed to meet the practical needs of a very imperfect people; whereas the teaching concerning the indissolubility of marriage was an *ideal*--an ideal for mankind in general and for Christians in particular. This distinction between laws and ideals is a very simple one, yet it is very fundamental and is often overlooked. No wise law-giver--least of all the all-wise Law-Giver--would frame a law on the principle that hate is equivalent to murder, or lust to adultery. Law can deal only with overt acts, not with secret thoughts. A wise ideal and

a wise law, though emanating from the same person, must of necessity be very different. The ideal will in a sense be far higher than the law. It is this confusion between ideal and law or, in other words, between moral law and civil law, which leads the superficial reader to regard the Sermon on the Mount as a repudiation of the Old Testament when, in fact, it is explicitly stated to be a fulfillment of the law and prophets. The same thing is clear in Mark 10:2-12, where Jesus goes back to Genesis 1:27, "God made them male and female," and 2:24, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one," and interprets Scripture by Scripture. It is *on the authority of Scripture* that he denies the validity of the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, which gives approval to divorce.

"Eye For an Eye"

Even his repudiation of the "eye for an eye" principle (Matt. 5:38-42), which comes from the Old Testament, cannot fairly be said to be a repudiation of what in its context the Old Testament taught. In Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21, we have laws given for the administration of public justice. The practice of private revenge and family feud was to be replaced by strictly fair and impartial public administration of justice.²⁰ In our Lord's day this excellent, if stern, principle of judicial retribution was being utilized as an excuse for the very thing that it was instituted to abolish, namely personal revenge. Our Lord gives no hint that he wishes to see the magistrate relaxing his important social function of witnessing to the majesty of the Law and to the sanctity of justice, but he does discourage his disciples from appealing to justice when it is for the merely selfish purpose of gaining their own rights. (Similarly in the story of the woman taken in adultery [John 7:53ff] Jesus does not say what would be the proper treatment in a legally constituted court. He says in effect, "I am not here now as Judge [cf. John 3:17]. I am here to call men to repentance while there is time. I call this woman, *and all her accusers*, to repentance.")

"Hate Your Enemy"

His final contrast again repudiates a misinterpretation of the Old Testament. The Old Testament had given the command, "You shall love your neighbor." This had been misinterpreted as involving the corollary, "You shall hate your enemy." But of course in making this addition, which is not a quotation from the Old Testament, the popular teaching was giving it a meaning which is not

²⁰We do not know much about the operation of the *lex talionis* in Old Testament times. It seems unlikely that it was intended, except in the case of murder, to be taken literally. The whole of Exodus 21:18-36 suggests that the payment of damages was envisaged. In most forms of Islamic law it is taken as a limiting concept. The "heirs of blood" must exact *not more than* equivalent damage or injury. This normally rules out physical injury, because there is no way of ensuring exact equivalence. Instead a tariff of payments is used. The folly of tribal revenge is seen most clearly when one tribe considers itself superior to another (which it usually does). It will then demand two or three deaths in return for one.

implied in the context. Leviticus 19:18 was a command originally intended to embrace every member of the Israelite community, and the rest of the verse makes it clear that an Israelite was not to seek for vengeance or to harbor grudges against any of his compatriots. Leviticus 19:34 goes further and applies the same principle to the resident alien: "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself." "Love your neighbor" in the Levitical rule already implied "Love your enemies."

It is true that the Old Testament in some sense expects the godly man to hate the enemies of God and the enemies of the people of God (cf. Deut. 20:16-18; 23:6; 25:17-19; Pss. 109; 139:21-24), but so in some sense does our Lord. The disciple must be prepared to "hate his own father and mother and wife and children" (Luke 14:26). The Son of man himself will one day utter the words, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire" (Matt. 25:41). He underlined and completely identified himself with the just judgments of God against sinners recorded in the Old Testament and with those foretold as yet to come, and at the same time he forgave his enemies and loved them even to the cross. The fact that at a certain period in his ministry he forbade James and John to follow the example of Elijah in calling down fire from heaven to consume his opponents is not to deny the reality of divine judgment on a very different occasion (Luke 9:51-56; 2 Kings 1:10, 12).

Cumulative Evidence

It has been said with truth that the attempt to evade the evidence for our Lord's teaching as to the God-giveness of Scripture is as futile as a mathematician's attempt to prove that it is possible to dodge an avalanche.²¹ He may satisfy himself that the trajectory of each boulder is calculable and that an agile man could step out of the way of any one of them. So, taken one at a time, ingenuity may satisfy itself that it can find ways of disposing of many of our Lord's statements about the Old Testament. But these statements do not come one at a time, they form a great avalanche of items of cumulative evidence which cannot in honesty be evaded. Furthermore, the consistency of the results which are obtained by taking the gospel evidence as it stands itself a vindication of our method of approach. The items of evidence support one another, suggesting that they derive from one mind, not from a miscellany of dubious church traditions.²²

There are many who profess that they would be willing to accept our Lord's teaching about the Bible, if only they could know for certain what that teaching was. But the accumulated errors of translation, of oral tradition, and of scribal transmission, leave them--they say--quite uncertain as to

²¹B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (London: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1959), pp. 119f.

²²This point is made in R. T. France's *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1971), which deals with the whole subject carefully and in detail, and to which I am greatly indebted in the Additional Note which follows.

what he did teach. Taking refuge behind this belief, they do not grapple with the gospel evidence, and they feel free to build their theology with a view of Scripture different from that which ordinary historical investigation shows to have been taught by Christ. But however much one may nibble at details of the gospel record on critical grounds, the overall picture can be affected only by a wholesale rejection of practically all of it, and this is a length to which few critics, however radical, are prepared to go. The evidence is clear:

To Christ the Old Testament was true, authoritative,
inspired.

To him the God of the Old Testament was the living God,
and the teaching of the Old Testament was the
teaching of the living God.

To him, what Scripture said, God said.

POSTSCRIPT

The subject of Jesus' view of the Old Testament is of the greatest importance to any Christian who regards Jesus as his Master and seeks to follow his teaching. But to many the foregoing argument may seem to raise as many questions as it answers.

It would be going beyond my brief discussion to deal with further questions, but I should like to add a note, expressing in the strongest terms my belief that it is in the area of secondary questions that perplexed Christians are in the greatest need of help at the present time. I thought it might be helpful to mention some questions that are dealt with in my published works which may not be covered in this symposium.

For example, most scholars would agree substantially with my analysis of Jesus' views, but many of them (including many who regard themselves as committed Christians) would not feel bound to make Jesus' view their own. And this for a simple reason. You have merely shown, they would say, that Jesus was a devout first-century Jew--which is not a very original or revolutionary conclusion! If he was truly man he could hardly have believed anything else. As a real man he must have shared the ignorance and errors of his own day, and some of these errors can be seen in the gospels. Was he not wrong about the time of his second coming, about the authorship of Psalm 110, and about Abiathar and Zechariah the son of Barachiah?

Another question concerns the way the New Testament quotes the Old Testament. Not infrequently the quotation is inexact and even, according to some interpreters, misleading (e.g., "out of Egypt I called my son," "seed, not seeds"). Does not this show that the New Testament writers had a less respectful view of the Old Testament than the one I am proposing? And what about typology and the use of non-canonical literature?

Another obvious question is: What about the New Testament? My argument about our Lord's view of the Old Testament evidently cannot be transferred to the New Testament directly, since none of it existed during his lifetime, and an authoritative Old Testament without an authoritative New Testament can hardly be satisfying to a Christian.

Then, again, how are we to regard the Apocrypha? What about Luther's strictures on the Epistle of James? What is the use of an infallible original, if it has been corrupted in transmission?

These questions and others are discussed in my book *Christ and the Bible* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973, \$3.95). Another area of difficulty concerns the morality of the Bible. If we accept Jesus' high view of the Old Testament, what are we to make of such things as the cursing psalms and God's command to the Israelites to exterminate their enemies? What of the horrors of judgment in biblical times and in the contemporary world and in the world to come? Such questions are discussed in my *The Goodness of God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1974, \$2.95).

ADDITIONAL NOTE

RADICAL CRITICISM OF THE GOSPELS

It may seem strange to qualify the term "Christian" by adding the clause "who regards the gospels as substantially true." It must be rare, as we have seen, for a convert from a non-Christian religion to declare his faith in Christ if he has not first come to believe the gospels to be substantially true. Conversion is normally the end of a process of growing belief that the gospel story is true and that Jesus was what he claimed to be. For those brought up in a Christian culture, however, the matter is often not so simple. A second-hand Christian belief subjected to criticism may become progressively less sure, while yet never reaching the point of explicit abandonment. It is not abandoned, but radically re-interpreted. Faith in Christ is affirmed, while knowledge of the Jesus of history is disclaimed. This is the position of many New Testament critics today as a result of their study of source and form and redaction criticism. The gospels, they believe, tell us much about the faith of the early church, but little about Jesus. It is our belief that such a position has been arrived at by abandoning the centrality of God and revelation and by adopting a naturalistic approach to the gospels. It is outside the scope of this book to deal with this question, but one or two remarks may be in place.

H. E. W. Turner²³ has distinguished two basic approaches to the gospels: the historical and the interpretative. The former believes that the gospels were intended to be historical records, the latter that they were essentially propaganda, written to present a particular view of Jesus. The former assumes that the records are true unless good reason can be shown to the

²³H. E. W. Turner, *Historicity and the Gospels* (London: Mowbray, 1963).

contrary; the latter assumes the opposite. The attitude of Bultmann and his school to a gospel-saying has been summarized as follows: "(1) If it reflects the faith of the church after the resurrection, it must be regarded as a creation of the church, rather than an authentic saying of Jesus. (2) If there is a parallel saying attributed to a Rabbi, it must be held as a Jewish tradition which has erroneously been attributed to Jesus. But if it is neither--if it is clearly distinct both from the faith of the church and from Judaism--then it may be safely accepted as authentic."²⁴ This means, of course, that any appeal to Scripture by Jesus is at once suspect. This approach produces an improbable view of both Jesus and the early church. Jesus becomes an eccentric who took almost nothing from his environment. The church becomes inexplicable, since it took almost nothing from its master. Rather it so altered what it received from him that its teaching can be seen in sharp contrast to the few genuine sayings which it preserved.

Such an approach is possible only on the supposition (a) of a long interval between the uttering of Christ's words and their committal to writing; and (b) of a general lack of interest in preserving his words accurately. The widely accepted notion that the church was almost entirely dependent on oral tradition for forty or more years is itself highly questionable. Indeed the idea that it had little concern to preserve an accurate account of the words and deeds of Jesus is highly improbable. In Judaism oral material was learned verbatim and passed on verbatim, as "holy tradition." There is nothing to suggest that Christians learned vast lengths of tradition mechanically, but there is much to suggest that the salient material was memorized and carefully handed on. Much of the teaching of Jesus is in poetic or easily memorized form. A special respect is shown for the sayings of Jesus. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 7:8, 10, 12, 25, 40, Paul declares his own words to be authoritative, yet puts the words of the Lord on a special plane.

Where Paul has no saying of Jesus to quote, he does not presume to invent one. While quotations of the words of Jesus in the epistles are not common, we have no evidence of the attribution to Jesus in the epistles of sayings invented to meet contemporary needs, nor do we find in the sayings attributed to Jesus in the gospels material culled from Pauline or other known Christian writings. The words of Jesus were treated as *sui generis*.²⁵

The terminology of tradition is used to describe the process of transmission. The apostles are regarded as its guardians.

To one who has been captured in heart and mind by the Jesus of the gospels, there appears to be a host of reasons for believing in the authenticity of the records. To regard the great mass of gospel teaching as the creation of the Christian community seems to posit a marvelous effect without a plausible cause. Here is what may fairly be claimed as the greatest literature of all

²⁴R. H. Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles* (London: Westminster, 1963) pp. 26f.

²⁵R. T. France, *The Use of the Old Testament by Jesus according to the Synoptic Gospels* (Bristol University Ph.D. thesis, 1966), p. 326.

time, yet supposedly created by the imagination of an undistinguished community. It seems far easier to suppose that the Jesus of the gospels created the community than that the community created the Jesus of the gospels. Many features in the gospels have an appearance of primitiveness: features have been retained which are liable to offend or perplex; the term "Son of man" (though hardly used in the early church) is a favorite title; the theme of the kingdom of God has far greater prominence in the gospels than in the New Testament as a whole; Aramaisms abound. There is complete lack of material in the gospels on such burning issues in the apostolic church as circumcision or charismatic gifts; there is little on baptism, the Gentile mission, food laws, and relations between church and state--and what little there is refers to the concerns of the period of Jesus' ministry and not to the form in which these issues confronted the church thirty years later. The question of Sabbath observance and of Corban were not apparently live issues at a later period. It seems hard to conceive that a religious movement living so close to the life and death of its founder could have failed to be interested in his words and deeds. The prologue of Luke claims accurate research and eye-witness authority. To one who believes in the authenticity of the gospels the person of Jesus has depth and breadth and balance and richness. He is real. He is known.

For one who does not see him so, there is no invincible argument. It may be, on the contrary, that for him it is the demands of a scientific approach which seem invincible in the twentieth century, and that therefore, if a scientific approach means a skeptical approach to a miracle, then only a skeptical approach to the gospels will do; and only a skeptical approach to the Christ of the gospels will do. When this position is adopted it may be questioned what ground is left for faith in Christ and whether belief in the incarnation has not become something quite different from that of historic Christianity. But this anti-miraculous, supposedly scientific approach is itself based on the unproved and unprovable dogma that nature behaves with invariable uniformity--which we reject. To believe that God has both revealed himself in Christ and has given us a true portrait of Christ in the gospels is on the purely human level no more contrary to reason than skepticism. If, however, this belief is true and God-given, then it is infinitely more reasonable, for it is to think God's thoughts after him.

FURTHER READING

The question of miracles is helpfully discussed by C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London: Bles, 1947). As far as the gospels are concerned, the key is the resurrection. If this took place, there is no difficulty in the principle about the other miracles. J. N. D. Anderson deals with *The Evidence for the Resurrection* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1950) concisely and clearly. D. P. Fuller's *Easter Faith and History* (London: Tyndale Press, 1968) discusses the critical and theological questions. I hope to deal with the harmony of the resurrection narratives (together with the dating and inter-relation of the four gospels) in a later volume.

At the most popular level, the following are useful on the authenticity of the gospels:

J. B. Phillips, *Ring of Truth* (London: Hodder, 1967).

E. M. B. Green, *Runaway World* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1968), chapter 1.

F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed. (London: InterVarsity Press, 1960).

Of more scholarly books, written from a variety of standpoints, the following contain valuable material:

D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London: Tyndale Press, 1970)--the standard conservative introduction.

F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (London: Nelson, 1969)--the standard conservative history.

R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1971).

E. B. Redlich, *Form Criticism: Its Value and Limitations* (London: Duckworth, 1939)--a useful critique of the formative period of the *Formgeschichte* movement.

C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: Black, 1966).

X. Léon-Dufour, *The Gospels and the Jesus of History* (London: Collins, 1968).

J. A. Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963), ch. I: "The Question of the Historical Jesus."

J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. I (London: SCM Press, 1971), ch. I: "How Reliable is the Tradition of the Sayings of Jesus?"

A. T. Hanson (ed.), *Vindications* (London: SCM Press, 1966)--the authors and most of the contributors are form critics who do not share the skeptical attitude to gospel history held by many of the school.

L. Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1969).

O. Borchert, *The Original Jesus* (London: Lutterworth, 1933)--argues the difficulty of believing that first-century thought could have invented the Jesus of the gospels.

THE APOSTLES' VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

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PAPER SUMMARY

The New Testament writers wrote because of their connection and commitment to Jesus Christ. They shared the same high view of Scripture that their Master held. The Old Testament was for them *the authority* in religious matters because God had spoken it by His Spirit through human writers. The New Testament writers also reveal that their own writings are the commands of the Lord and equal in authority to the Old Testament revelation. This authority is not human authority but the Spirit of Christ giving the commands of Christ to His people.

THE APOSTLES' VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

Edwin A. Blum

In seeking to understand the Bible, it is basic to listen to what the Bible says about itself. Its own self testimony should be the source of every Christian doctrine and particularly of the crucial doctrines of Scripture. What do the documents themselves say? How did the authors view the Old Testament books? How did the authors view their own writings? Were they aware of other New Testament writers? If so, how did they view their writings? Since the essay by John Wenham has sought to explore Christ's view of the Bible, this paper will not cover the passages cited there except to note the connection between Christ and the views of His pupils.

THE CONNECTION TO CHRIST

The person of Jesus Christ is the central theme of the New Testament and the foundation of its existence as writings. The men who wrote did so because of their connection with Jesus Christ. Without Him, they would not have written what they did or in the manner they did.¹ The material they record of Jesus' view of Scripture is recorded because of the writers' personal faith in Jesus and because of His instruction of His disciples. The gospel writers portray Him as the great teacher (in addition to the main portrayal as the Savior). As the true teacher, He teaches the way of God in truth (Matt. 22:16). In particular, He is the teacher of the Word of God. He is the only one who correctly understands its force and able to expound its significance (cf. Matt. 4:4-10, 5:17-44, 7:28-29).² The views of Jesus on the Old Testament are also the views of the gospel writers. This is so because the writers depict Jesus and His views with approval, and an examination of the gospel writers' own use of Scripture reveals the same reverence and submission to its authority. In particular, the following six passages may be cited: Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 17:16-17; John 10:33-36; Matthew 22:23-32; Luke 18:31; 24:25, 44.³ These passages not only tell us about Christ's view that the

¹For a highly instructive essay on Jesus' "pesher interpretations" and the distinctive approach of his disciples, cf. Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) pp. 70-75, 98-103, 140-157, 210-211.

²Matthew, in particular, gives extensive development to Jesus as the teacher (cf. his use of διδάσκω, διδάσκαλος n.b. *TDNT*, 2.138-165). Matthew also gives the greatest emphasis in the quotation of biblical materials using the "pesher" method. Cf. F. C. Grant, "Matthew, Gospel Of" in *IDB* 3.302-313. Grant gives a list with brief comments on 61 Old Testament quotations in Matthew. Longenecker (*Biblical Exegesis*) also gives a discussion of 11 Matthean quotations which he views as "pesher" type citations, pp. 140-157.

³For detailed treatment of these texts, cf. John F. Wenham's "Christ's View of Scripture" (paper No. 1), or his book, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973).

Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled to the most minute point, but they also provide evidence for the views of the writers.⁴

The New Testament writers are connected to Jesus in relation to authority. Jesus in His ministry revealed Himself as having authority in His words (Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22, 27; Luke 4:32). The authority of His words was demonstrated in the sign deeds which He did (Luke 4:36; Mark 2:10). The mighty power or authority of the Father has been given to the exalted Son in His resurrection so that He can say, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Matt. 28:18). Because He has this authority, He can and does delegate authority to His apostles (Matt. 28:19-20; John 20:21-23). These apostles form the foundation of the church (Matt. 16:18-19; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 2:20). As part of their endowment, Jesus gives the promise of the Holy Spirit, who will guide and lead them into all truth (John 14:26; 15:26, 27; 16:13-15). The truth which the Spirit of Truth teaches them is the truth about Jesus, which before the death, burial, and the resurrection, the disciples were unable to comprehend. But after the events, the Holy Spirit reminds them of events and their significance and enables them to understand and to believe (cf. John 2:22). As the apostles are commissioned to preach the message about Jesus' death and resurrection, they are also instructed and enabled by the Spirit of Truth to teach the truth to the church. The understanding of the authoritative teaching ministry by the writers of Scripture in the enablement of the Holy Spirit of Truth is a fundamental consideration in the estimation of the value and trustworthiness of their individual statements.⁵

THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS' VIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS

Their Quotations and Allusions to the Old Testament

In the reading of the New Testament books, one is struck by the great number of quotations and allusions to the Old Testament. Nicole estimates 295 quotations with many more allusions for a total of at least 10 percent of the New Testament text to be Old Testament material.⁶ D. Hay counts 239

"It is, of course, common in modern theology to argue the contrary position--that is, that the aspected views of Jesus are *not* the views of Jesus but the views of the writers set forth as the views of Jesus (cf. N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* [New York: Harper & Row, 1967], pp. 15-20). If this were adopted, the discernment of Jesus' *own* views would be virtually impossible.

⁵It is to be noted that the words "apostle" and "writer of New Testament Scripture" are interchanged in this paper. It is not assumed that all New Testament writers were apostles in the technical sense, but that they all had Spirit-endowed power in writing and it is quite proper to call their books "apostolic writings." Cf. N. H. Ridderbos, *The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963), pp. 13-33.

⁶Roger Nicole, "New Testament Use of the Old," *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), pp. 137-138. Nicole's essay contains a number of helpful points which may be of aid to anyone who wants a good survey of the phenomena. Many of the implications for the doctrine of inspiration are developed. Cf. also Longenecker on the phenomena of quotations in *Biblical Exegesis*, pp. 164-170.

quotations with an introductory formula, 1600 citations of the Old Testament, and many more allusions to it.⁷ The material is used in a variety of ways. For example, it may be reproduced to support or to illustrate an argument, or serve as a point of departure in a discussion, or act as a proof-text. What is constant throughout all the books and the writers is the view that the books of the Old Testament are authoritative. It is common among writers in the present day to cite an authority when it is needed. This procedure was followed by the ancient writers as well. For example, in the Gospel of John there are 15 direct quotations. Four are found in chapter 12, which concerns the entry into Jerusalem and the explanation of Jewish blindness. Another 4 citations are in chapter 19 which relates to the death of Jesus. The remainder of the quotes are all at important places as well. The author cites as an authority, the Old Testament, to fix his point or to explain an event or to demonstrate a fulfillment.

An illustration of the use of the Old Testament by a New Testament writer is Paul's in chapters 9, 10, and 11 of Romans. In all of his letters he cites the Old Testament 93 times (or 1/3 of the total of Old Testament citations [with introductory formulas] in the New), yet 26 of his quotes occur in these chapters. Doubtless his reasons for quotation are manifold, but one of his main reasons is to give support and clarification in the difficult understanding of how the Jewish people could miss Jesus as Messiah. The "hard" teaching of sovereign mercy and punishment is buttressed by Old Testament Scriptures (cf. 9:12, 13, 15, 17).

In the use of Scripture as their authority, it is clearly their supreme authority! It is used as an absolute authority and not a relative authority. They do not attempt to correct it⁸ nor do they seek to put one Old Testament book or saying against another. They assume it speaks with a unified voice. They do recognize that the books were written by human authors, but God speaks *in* and *through* them (cf. Rom. 9:27, 29; Acts 4:25; 28:25). The author of the book of Hebrews has a distinctive style of quotation in that he mentions the human authors of the Old Testament writings in only two cases (9:20; 12:21). In all other cases, it is God, the Spirit, or even Christ who speaks (cf. 1:5-13; 3:7-11; 2:12-13).

In the light of the current controversy on inerrancy within Evangelicalism, the church would do well to listen to the emphasis of the author of the book of Hebrews. After two centuries of historical-critical study, many scholars have focused their attention on "Paul's view" or "John's view" or "first Isaiah's view" to the near exclusion of what *God* is saying. Without a lapse

⁷D. Hay, "New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament," "Interpretation, History Of," *IDB Sup.*, p. 443.

⁸It is well known that the Scripture writers cite various readings of Greek versions and of the Hebrew text. They often appear to use a quite free handling of the text, which could be a problem for defenders of inerrancy. Yet Old Testament textual criticism is by no means settled, and the phenomena of variant readings may simply witness to the existence of numerous translations and textual traditions in the biblical times. Cf. R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, pp. 113-114.

into a docetic understanding of the relationship between the dual authorship, the modern evangelical should recognize that what the human author says, God is saying *in* and *through* him (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37; Heb. 3:7; 4:7; Gal. 3:8).⁹ It is important that men spoke and wrote, but far more significant that God *speaks*. The author of *Hebrews* recognizes this and clearly teaches this by his quotation practice.

The Introductory Formulas

The Scripture writers use various introductory formulas which help in understanding their view of the Old Testament. One of the most common is the expression *gegraptai*, "it is written." Shrenk discusses the use of *graphō* in its forms and expressions and finds a similarity in both the Greek and Israelite employment. In both spheres, it is used as a legal expression for that which is authoritatively binding. "What is quoted as *gegraptai* is normative because it is guaranteed by the binding power of Yahweh, the King and Lawgiver."¹⁰ Warfield's article, on "It says:" "Scripture says:" "God says," while now old, is still valuable for its collection of material on authoritative citation.¹¹ "Scripture speaking" is "God speaking" to the minds of the New Testament writers according to the constant interchange of the introductory formulas, cf. Acts 13:34; Rom. 9:13, 15, 17.

The introductory formulas do not always bypass the human authors of Scripture. Paul uses such expressions as: "He says also in Hosea" (Rom. 9:25), "Isaiah cries out" (Rom. 9:27), "As Isaiah foretold" (Rom. 9:29), "Moses says" (Rom. 10:19), "Isaiah is very bold and says" (Rom. 10:20). These expressions show that Paul's view of inspiration gives full place to the human personalities in the process. Yet in all this, the words written are God's words because of the prophetic spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:12-14; 14:37).¹²

The Oracles of God

The expression *ta logia*, "the oracles," is used by the New Testament writers to describe the Old Testament. Paul, in speaking of the Jewish advantages over the Gentiles, says, "First of all, that they were entrusted with the

⁹For interesting information of the out-of-balance character of many modern exegetes in this focus on the human author with the historical-critical method to the neglect of what God says, cf. K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. E. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University, 1933) p. 1. B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), chapter 8, "Recovering an Exegetical Tradition," pp. 139-147. B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), p. ix.

¹⁰Gottlob Schrenk, "γράφω," *TDNT*, 1.747.

¹¹B. B. Warfield, "It Says:" "Scripture Says:" "God Says," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 10 (1899), pp. 472-510. Reprinted in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. by Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1951), pp. 299-348.

¹²E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957). Cf. pp. 22-25 on introductory formulas.

oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). What does he mean by this statement? In classical Greek the word was used to denote an oracle given by a god. In the Greek Old Testament it is used in a variety of ways: to categorize an individual statement, to refer to the commandments, or to speak of the Word of God in a general way (cf. Isa. 28:13; Deut. 33:9; Ps. 119 [LXX 118]).¹³ The Romans passage is best understood as referring to the whole Old Testament rather than to the particulars of it. This expression would then mean that the *whole Old Testament is God's speech* in a written form. The oracle may be given through a spokesman but the end product is a "Thus says the Lord." The other New Testament uses of the word are: (1) Acts 7:38 of Moses ". . . and he received living oracles to pass on to you." (2) 1 Pet. 4:11 "Whoever speaks, (let him speak), as it were, the utterances of God." (3) Heb. 5:12 ". . . for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God." Of these three texts, the Acts reference is next in significance to the Romans passage. It stresses the divine origination of Moses' legislation.

The Scriptures

The writers of the New Testament constantly refer to the Old Testament writings as *graphē*, "Scripture." Originally the word in Greek usage meant something "written" or "published" and was used in secular ways. In the New Testament it is used exclusively with a sacred meaning of Holy Scripture.¹⁴ This employment of the word comes from Judaism which possessed its "Law," "Prophets," and "(other) Scriptures" (*Kētûbîm*).¹⁵ The word *graphē* is used about 50 times in the New Testament either in the singular or the plural. Paul in Romans 1:2 calls the Old Testament writings "*Holy Scriptures*." The writers of the New Testament books as Jews (in the main) can be expected to have the positions of their contemporaries. Schrenk characterizes the Judaistic view in these words:

According to the later Jewish view, Scripture has sacred, authoritative, and normative significance. It is of permanent and unassailable validity. As the dictate of God, it is given by His Spirit. This view referred originally to the Pentateuch but was then transferred to the Prophets and Writings. The implication of the doctrine of inspiration is that the revealed truth of God *characterizes every word*.¹⁶ (*Italics mine*)

¹³Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 1.178-9. On λόγιον see G. Kittel in *TDNT* 4.140-143 and the long classic article by B. B. Warfield, "The Oracles of God," originally in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 11 (1900), pp. 217-260. Reprinted in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 351-407.

¹⁴BAG, p. 165.

¹⁵B. B. Warfield, "The Terms 'Scripture' and 'Scriptures' as Employed in the New Testament," reprinted in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 229-241.

¹⁶G. Schrenk, *TDNT* 1.755. Cf. also Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, pp. 19, 48, 49.

While the words "the dictate of God" may strike one as contrary to the normal understanding of inspiration taught in the Bible (that is, not a dictation theory), yet the fact remains of the high view of the writings. Passages in the Old Testament such as the following show the penetration of God into the personality of the human authors of the Scriptures:

The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me
And His word was upon my tongue (2 Sam. 23:2)

But Jehovah said unto me, say not, I am a child;
For to whomsoever I shall send thee, thou shalt go,
And whatsoever I shall command thee, thou shalt speak. . . .
Then Jehovah put forth His hand, and touched my mouth;
and Jehovah said unto me,
Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth (Jer. 1:7, 9)

Thou shalt be as my mouth . . . (Jer. 15:19) (cf. 20:7-9)

Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah;
And Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of
Jehovah, which He had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book.
(Jer. 36:4, cf. v. 6). (All of the above from ASV.)

The consideration of the term *Scripture* or Writings and the work of the Spirit of God in the production of the books leads to the examination of the classical texts on the inspiration of the Old Testament.

2 Timothy 3:13-17

But evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse,
deceiving and being deceived.
You, however, continue in the things you have learned and
become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them;
and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings
which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to
salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching,
for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every
good work (2 Tim. 3:13-17, NASB).

Paul, in his last letter, is writing to his young disciple, Timothy. He seeks to prepare him and the growing infant church for the difficult days ahead. He himself has been persecuted and so will all who seek to live a godly life in the midst of an age of increasing wickedness. In the middle of conflict, it is a natural tendency to be anxious and perhaps to be irresolute. Paul wants Timothy, and through him, the church, to be strong and steadfast, not pulling back in the face of opposition of men against the truth. Instead, the church and its leaders must continue in their proclamation and teaching ministry with confidence and conviction. Timothy is to have confidence for two reasons: first, in contrast to the deception of the false teachers,

Timothy knows the proven character of the life of those from whom he has learned (his mother, his grandmother, and Paul). Second, his confidence is also based on the foundation of the sacred writings (*hiera grammata*) in which he has been instructed since childhood.

The sacred writings are the Old Testament books, which are so valuable because they have the ability to make one wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Scripture is not rightly used or understood unless one comes to faith in Jesus as the Messiah and personal Savior. In contrast to ungodly men, who may learn a great amount, but never come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:1-9), by the Scripture and Scriptural instruction one comes to know truth, or as Paul puts it in another passage, "truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). Of course, it is Paul's conviction that the Scripture speaks of the Messiah and that Jesus is the One of whom it speaks: "For I delivered to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Paul, in 2 Tim. 3:15-17, has as his main purpose to help Timothy *mene*, "persevere." Paul's reminder of the profitability of the Scripture and the purpose of Scripture is his main emphasis. This is clearly seen by the use of "for" (*pros*) five times in vv. 16-17 and the use of "in order that" (*hina*) in v. 17.

The crucial words in v. 16 are *πάσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ωφέλιμος* which are translated in the *NASB* as "¹All Scripture is ²inspired by God and profitable. . . ." The marginal notes read "16 ¹Or possibly, *Every Scripture inspired by God is also . . .* ²Lit., *God breathed.*" From the observation of the English translations, the reader without a knowledge of Greek can quickly see the exegetical problems and possibilities. Conservative translations and commentators tend to favor "All Scripture" rather than "Every Scripture" because, first, the syntax of *pas*, "all, every" with an anarthrous noun presents special problems. C. F. D. Moule writes in his discussion of the idioms, "II Tim. iii.16 *πάσα γραφή θεόπνευστος* (which is most unlikely to mean *every inspired Scripture*, and much more probably means *the whole of Scripture [is] inspired*)."¹⁷ Second, the context favors the idea that Paul

¹⁷C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: At the University, 1953), p. 95. Niger Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, founded by James H. Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) Vol. III *Syntax*, says the following on *pas*:

In the interests of exegesis it is important to ask how much is involved in the Hellenistic deviation from classical standards as to the def. art. with *πᾶς*. First of all, *πᾶς* before an anarthrous noun means *every* in the sense of *any*; not every individual, like *εκάστος*, but any you please.

His translation for the text under consideration is "2 Tim. 3¹⁶ *πάσα γραφή whatever is Scripture*," p. 199. But he goes on to say, "On the other hand, this anarthrous *πᾶς* also means *all, the whole of*, just as it does when it has the art. It may be that is due to Hebraic influence: For *לְכָל-בָּשָׂר* becomes *πάσα σαρκί all flesh* . . ." pp. 199-200. He cites 13 examples in the New Testament of this usage. 2 Tim. 3:16 could just as well be cited under this category.

is thinking of the Old Testament in its entirety. Third, the translation "Every Scripture" has sometimes been taken to mean "Every inspired Scripture is profitable" leaving the ambiguity that there may be other "Scripture" or parts of Scripture which are not inspired or not profitable. This understanding is a possible one based on the words of the Greek text alone without consideration of the context, the usage of *graphē* in the New Testament, or the Jewish ideas of inspiration. But if one does take these factors into consideration, the *NASB* is a good translation.

Other technical matters of translation are controverted in this key text. In the *NASB*, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable," the placing of the word *is* (not in the Greek text) and the translation of "and" for the Greek *kai* are sometimes disputed. The translation of "and" for *kai* is normal rather than the less common "also" which would be almost required if the copula "is" is inserted in a different place. For example, "Every inspired Scripture *is also* useful." The omission of the Greek word, "is," in the original text is a common feature of Greek grammar.¹⁸ The placing of "is" before "inspired and profitable" is justified because both words are adjectives and it seems natural to take them in a parallel way as predicative. The structure of the sentence in Greek is the same as that of 1 Tim. 4:4 which is translated with both adjectives in the predicative sense.¹⁹

The last item to be considered in this text is the meaning of the adjective rendered "inspired by God," *theopneustos*. Kelly says "Literally meaning 'breathed into by God.'"²⁰ The lexicographers normally translate as "inspired by God."²¹ B. B. Warfield wrote an article of some 50 pages in 1900 on the meaning of this term. He concluded:

From all points of approach alike we appear to be conducted to the conclusion that it is primarily expressive of the origination of Scripture, not of its nature and much less of its effects. What is *θεόπνευστος* is "God-breathed," produced by the creative breath of the Almighty. And Scripture is called *θεόπνευστος* in order to designate it as "God-breathed," the project of Divine spiration, the creation of that Spirit who is in all spheres of the Divine activity the executive of the Godhead. The traditional translation of the word by the Latin *inspiratus a Deo* is no doubt also discredited, if we are to take it at the foot of the letter. It does not express a breathing *into* the Scriptures by God. But the ordinary conception attached

¹⁸BDF, p. 70.

¹⁹J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 203. For a contrary opinion, cf. Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelman, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. by P. Buttolph and A. Yarbro (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962), p. 120.

²⁰Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 203.

²¹BAG s.v., Bauer⁵ "Von Gott Eingegeben, Inspiriert."

to it, whether among the Fathers or the Dogmaticians, is in general vindicated. What it affirms is that the Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation. It is on this foundation of Divine origin that all the high attributes of Scripture are built.²²

Warfield, therefore, stressed the meaning of the term to be "God-breathed" rather than "inspired" or "breathed into by God." Most modern writers or lexicographers seem to ignore his work or give no evidence of a knowledge of it.²³ To sum up: the profitability of Scripture is due to its origin, which is "God-breathed."

Another matter may be considered in relation to this key text. What were the Jewish or Hellenistic teachings of "inspiration" at this time? Paul Billerback in his *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* has a section on the Jewish understandings of the concept.²⁴ The Law was often considered to be pre-existent. It was taught to Moses, or dictated, or even written by God Himself. The Prophets and Writings were also considered of divine origination by the early writers of Judaism. But three theories were offered. The oldest and dominant view is that God supplied the content of the books to the authors by inspiration. Another early view sees the contents revealed to Moses at Sinai and transmitted by tradition. A later view has God giving the contents of the Prophets and Writings to the pre-existent souls of their authors at Mt. Sinai.

E. Schweizer says of the 2 Tim. 3:16 passage, "The usage is Hell. hence Hell. inspiration manticism lies behind it + 345,4 ff."²⁵ In the Hellenistic world, Apollo fills a woman with his divine breath and the person is possessed. A variety of effects take place including Bacchantic frenzy, ecstatic speech and at Delphi, prophecy.²⁶ But the New Testament does not use the distinctive language of the world of enthusiasm.²⁷

Several items should be noted. Whether one finds a Hellenistic or a Judaistic background to the concept of "inspiration" in 2 Tim. 3:16, both backgrounds stress the origination of the utterances or written material in God. From the New Testament viewpoint, the Hellenistic Manticism appears to be closer to demon possession, *daimonion*, than to the biblical concept of the working of the Holy Spirit. In the biblical cases of demon possession, the human

²²B. B. Warfield, Reprinted in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 245-296, from *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 11 (1900), pp. 89-130, "God-Inspired Scripture."

²³For example, cf. *TDNT*, s.v.; *BAG*, s.v.; Kelly.

²⁴Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: C. H. Beck, reprint 1969), IV/1.435-451.

²⁵E. Schweizer, *TDNT* 6.454.

²⁶H. Kleinknecht, *TDNT* 6.345-346.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 358-359.

personality appears to be often overpowered (cf. Mark 5:3-7; Matt. 15:22; Luke 9:39-42). The major Rabbinic conceptions with their stress on dictation also do not seem to do justice to the phenomena of the human authors. In contrast, the New Testament conception of "inspiration" stresses divine origination but at the same time involves the human personality. The main texts supporting this are 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37; Rom. 10:20. A consideration of 2 Pet. 1:20-21 may help in the understanding of the biblical writers' view of the Old Testament Scripture production.

2 Peter 1:20-21

And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet. 1:19-21 NASB).

Peter,²⁸ in his second letter, writes to remind Christians of the basic truths of Christianity, so that they will be firmly established in the truth even after his death (1:12-15). The apostolic message about the glory of Jesus is not mythical, for it is based on eyewitness testimony of the apostles themselves (1:16-18). The heavenly testimony which God gave to His Son at the Transfiguration is a confirmation of the message of prophecy (1:17-19a). In view of the Christological fulfillment and the Father's confirmation of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christians are to study and pay careful attention to the Word of God. It will provide light in the midst of the murky darkness for the Christian until the return of Christ, who will bring the bright daylight of God's day and transform the heart (1:19). Most translations and commentators on v. 20 interpret it as a warning against the misuse of Scripture by a faulty interpretation. Thus, the correct interpretation is the interpretation intended by the Holy Spirit, for He is the One who is the Originator of the prophecies.²⁹ However, the verse makes good sense if the translation reads, "Recognize this truth to be of the utmost importance--that no prophecy of Scripture arises from private untying."³⁰ The critical word is *epilyseōs* and the basic idea of both the noun and the related verb in classical Greek is to "release from" or "loose" or "untie." The developed meanings shade into "solving difficulties" or "giving explanations" or even the thought of origination.

²⁸The Petrine authorship of 2 Peter is strongly disputed. The evangelical case is stoutly maintained by Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (London: Tyndale, 1970³) and Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale, 1968).

²⁹CF. the discussion in K. H. Schelkle, *Die Petrusbriefe Der Judasbrief*⁴ (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), p. 201. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 323-325.

³⁰Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale, 1968), pp. 89-90.

Whichever view is taken in v. 20 does not seriously affect the thought of v. 21. But if the *origination* of Scripture is the subject of v. 20 rather than *interpretation*, v. 21 makes a conclusion to the argument of the paragraph. The *gar*, "for," is explanatory of the origin of the prophetic word to which the Christian is to pay careful attention. The reason why Christians can have confidence is that the human writers of Scripture are not like the false prophets who speak their own ideas. The Old Testament prophets often condemned the false prophets:

Thus says the Lord of Hosts,
 "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are
 prophesying to you.
 They are leading you into futility;
 They speak a vision of their own imagination,
 Not from the mouth of the Lord" (Jer. 23:16, *NASB*).

Thus says the Lord God, "Woe to the foolish prophets
 who are following their own spirit and have seen
 nothing" (Ezek. 13:3, *NASB*).

In contrast, Peter affirms that "no prophecy was ever brought by the volition of man but men spoke from God being carried (or "being moved") by the Holy Spirit." This text is remarkable in its clarity of the cooperation of the dual authors of Scripture. Green explains the figure of speech involved in this passage.

He uses a fascinating maritime metaphor in verse 21 (cf. Acts xxvii. 15, 17, where the same word, *pheromenē*, is used of a ship carried along by the wind). The prophets raised their sails, so to speak (they were obedient and receptive), and the Holy Spirit filled them and carried their craft along in the direction He wished. Men spoke: God spoke.³¹

Peter's teaching on inspiration may be taken as common to all the New Testament writers. Extra-biblical sources confirm this common belief among the Jews of the production by the Spirit of the Scriptures. In addition to the testimonies in Strack-Billerbeck (cf. n. 24), the testimony of the Qumran writings (e.g. 1 QS 8:16; 6 QD 2:12), and that of Philo and Josephus may be added. An interesting passage occurs in Josephus' work, *Against Apion* 1.37, 38, in which he affirms that the Jewish prophets obtained knowledge of their history:

. . . through the inspiration which they owed to God, and committing to writing a clear account of the events of their own time just as they occurred)--it follows, I say that we do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with each other. Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time.³²

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³² Loeb Edition, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, 1:179.

In the light of the current controversy over inerrancy, in which some seek to affirm errors in the inspired text, the words of Josephus may help to show that the idea of an inspired-errant Bible is a modern attempt of synthesis of the biblical concept of inspiration with the historical-critical method. For example, Herman Ridderbos claims, ". . . We see occasionally that one evangelist purposely introduces changes into what another has written, sometimes, apparently, in order to correct him."³³ In spite of his general conservative position, his guarded language, and his desire to avoid an "abstract theological concept of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures,"³⁴ the danger appears that he is falling into an unbiblical view of inspiration because it is foreign to what the New Testament writers understood as inspiration and seeks to substitute for it a "conservative historical-critical view."

Galatians 3:16

An instructive example of the New Testament writers' view of the Old Testament is Paul's use of the word *seed* in Galatians 3:16. "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ" (Gal. 3:16, *NASB*). Other examples of the belief of the writers of the New Testament in the accuracy of the Old Testament down to the most minute detail could be cited (e.g., Matt. 21:2-5; John 19:23-24 of fulfillment even including Hebrew parallelism), but Paul's argument in Galatians 3:16 is classic, for it sees significance in the use of a singular number. Many have objected to Paul's understanding as fanciful or as a Rabbinic view without merit. Yet the significance of his usage lies in the argument of the whole chapter of Galatians 3. In it he argues that it is the "faith-hearers," not the "law-doers" who are Abraham's seed. The Judaizers were teaching that to participate in the Abrahamic blessings, the Galatians would have to keep the Law. Paul counters that if people subsequent to the giving of the Law become Abraham's seed by law-doing, then there are *two kinds of seed*: "faith-hearer-seed" and "law-doer-seed." Paul notes that the Old Testament does not speak of "seeds" but "seed." So he sees significance in the grammatical form. It may be noted that the use of a collective singular fits the idea that the stress is on one *kind* of seed rather than one numerical seed, for Christ is *the* seed and Christians are seed (v. 29).

THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS' VIEW OF THEIR OWN WRITINGS

The New Testament writers' view their own authority to be that which comes from God. Paul, in particular, calls himself an apostle, a herald, a witness, and an ambassador (cf. Rom. 1:1, 5; 1 Tim. 2:7; Gal. 1:8, 9; 1 Thess. 2:13).³⁵ He is conscious that the letters which he writes are to be obeyed and to be read in the churches (Col. 4:16; 2 Thess. 3:14). This practice of public

³³Herman Ridderbos, *Studies in Scripture and Its Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 28.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 21.

reading follows the practice of the synagogue, in which the Old Testament writings were read (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:15). The new prophetic word is now to be read and obeyed (Rev. 1:3).

Within Paul's letters, one finds many indications of his conviction that what he is communicating is authoritative. 1 Corinthians 2:13 reads: "which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:13, *NASB*). The sentence probably does not directly refer to the writing ministry of Paul but rather to his preaching and teaching. Yet, the importance of the text is the stress on the Spirit teaching him so that what he says is not human wisdom but the words that the Spirit wants. 1 Corinthians 7:12 reads, "But to the rest I say, not the Lord . . .". Contrary to some misconceptions, Paul is not disclaiming inspiration or authority for what he says, but rather he is distinguishing that word of command which the Lord Jesus gave during the days of His stay on earth (v. 10) from what Paul now gives as a command to the people of God in a new situation with the spread of the gospel.³⁶ As support for this, it should be noted that this command Paul is ordering in all the churches (1 Cor. 7:17, *diatassō*, "I order" or "command").

In the same letter he also writes, "If any one thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment" (1 Cor. 14:37, *NASB*). In this statement, an indication is seen of the linking of the Pauline writing to the church of Corinth with the Lord's command. To ask the question (which now troubles the Church), "Are there errors in the Scripture (Old Testament) or in the New Testament letters?" and to think, "How would Paul have answered?" is interesting. Could he conceive of a command of the Lord with error in it? Could he conceive of "the Christ speaking in Him" (τοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ λαλοῦντος Χριστοῦ, 2 Cor. 13:3) to be in error or to be ignorant? Certainly Paul's Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3) and who is Truth Himself, would not be in error.

Other writers of New Testament books give similar witness. For example, Luke, in the prologue to his gospel (1:1-4), addresses his reader and tells him of his care in writing so that the faith of the reader may be built upon unshakeable historical facts. John, in his gospel, affirms that the things about which he writes actually took place in the presence of witnesses (John 20:30) and that the testimony which is given to Jesus is true (John 19:35). In addition, there is the promised Holy Spirit, who reminds, teaches, and guides the apostles into all truth (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).³⁷ Peter states that the apostolic witness is not based on error or myth but on

³⁶C. K. Barrett writes: "Paul distinguishes sharply his own judgment from a pronouncement traceable to Jesus, but this does not mean that he regards his charge here as having no authority, or even significantly less authority than that of verse 10." *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 163.

³⁷On the concepts of the truth and witness, cf. James M. Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

eyewitness experience (2 Pet. 1:16). John in his *Revelation* states that what he writes is the word of God, to which not one word should be added or deleted under penalty of a curse (1:1, 2, 11; 20:18-19). The believer should read the book and obey it (1:3).

Paul, in 1 Timothy 5:18 writes, "For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'" The first quotation comes from Deuteronomy 25:4 and the second is found in Luke 10:7. The most normal inference is that Paul is calling both Deuteronomy and Luke, "Scripture." Another example of calling a New Testament writing "Scripture" is found in 2 Peter.

In conclusion, the words of Peter are profitable to remember: Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:14-18, *NASB*)

Peter, in his letter, warns of false teachers and of error in the understanding of Scripture. He calls *Paul's writings*, "Scriptures" (and on the same level as the Old Testament), which are not always understood and which many distort. This warning to the Church should cause it to listen to Scripture itself to see what the Spirit is saying to it. May the Church come to the view of Scripture that Christ and His apostles had and thus be biblical in its theology.

ALLEGED ERRORS AND DISCREPANCIES IN THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS OF THE BIBLE

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PAPER SUMMARY

This paper discusses alleged difficulties in Scripture which are referred to by some as "errors" and demonstrates why they do not pose serious problems. Specifically this paper addresses the difficulties raised by two authors: William LaSor in *Theology, News and Notes*, and Dewey Beegle in *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*. Some of the difficulties LaSor is concerned with are the discrepancies in numbers between Chronicles and Samuel/Kings, the differences in the resurrection narratives, the dating of the exodus, and Peter's denial of Christ. Beegle only lists one area that concerns LaSor, but poses several which he feels are damaging to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, such as the length of the reign of King Pekah of Israel, the age of Terah when Abraham left Haran, the burial of Jacob, the length of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, and how many times the cock crowed after Peter's denial of Christ. This paper shows how all of these alleged errors and difficulties have good explanations.

ALLEGED ERRORS AND DISCREPANCIES IN THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS OF THE BIBLE

Gleason L. Archer

In a 1976 publication of Fuller Seminary appears an article by Dr. William LaSor entitled, "Life under Tension--Fuller Theological Seminary and 'The Battle for the Bible.'"¹ In this memoir concerning the first 17 years of Fuller Seminary's history, Dr. LaSor makes a plea for a concept of biblical authority that preserves the theological errorlessness of Scripture without vouching for its freedom from factual mistake in matters of history or physical science. On pp. 26-27 he states firmly: "I believe that the Bible is without error, but I refuse to let someone else define what that means in such a way that I have to go to ridiculous extremes to defend my faith." In other words, Dr. LaSor prefers to occupy a position of defense for the Christian faith which does not compel him to fend off attacks against the trustworthiness of Scripture in areas where its veracity may be factually tested. He regards the alleged inaccuracies of the biblical text in regard to names and numbers, genealogies and episodic details as minor in importance, and hardly worth arguing about. He even suggests that Christ would regard dispute about such details as inconsequential, in the same class with tithing mint and dill and cummin, and he adds this query: "I wonder what he thinks of our internecine battle over the lesser matters of Scripture."

To my mind it is clear what Christ thinks about the importance of the trustworthiness of Scripture. In his acceptance of the historicity of Jonah's adventure with the whale (Matt. 12:40), of the destruction of all mankind by a great flood in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:38-39), and of the miraculous feeding of the Israelite host in the Exodus wanderings (John 6:49), or of such precise details as the 3 1/2 years of Elijah's famine (Luke 4:29), the Lord Jesus made it clear that regardless of the skepticism of unbelieving critics, these great events took place in history just as the Old Testament recorded them. It is safe to say that in no recorded utterance of Jesus himself, or in any written or spoken statement of his apostles, is there a suggestion that there is any scientific or historical inaccuracy in any record found in the Old Testament. Whatever the Hebrew Scriptures affirmed, whether in regard to theology, history or science, was assumed to be trustworthy and accurate at every level, according to the intention of the original author. To the scientific skepticism of the Sadducees, scholars in regard to the resurrection of the dead Jesus yielded no ground, but showed from God's recorded affirmation to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 6:3) that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive and well even four centuries after their death. Christ and the Apostles firmly believed that all mankind were descended from an historical Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4-5; Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Tim. 2:13-14) exactly as recorded in Genesis 1-3. Since these facts are rejected by modern scientists who are not committed to the Christian position, and likewise by

¹*The Authority of Scripture at Fuller* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary Alumni, *Theology, News and Notes*, Special Issue, 1976), pp. 5-10, 23-28.

non-evangelical Bible scholars and theologians, the issue seems to be drawn at this very point, which has been down-graded to the status of a minor detail, not worthy of "internecine strife" among professing Christians. To Jesus himself matters of scientific accuracy were of importance, and he showed himself unswayed by considerations of scientific probability or historical likelihood, which bulk so large in the eyes of those who reject the inerrancy of Scripture today. Indeed, it would have been strange if Christ had made an effort to restrict himself to the bounds of historical or scientific probability, since nothing in the universe could have been so improbable as to suppose that God would become man through the Virgin Birth. Compared to the unlikelihood of the Incarnation other objections fade into insignificance. And yet it is because of this near-impossibility that fallen mankind has hope of salvation and eternal life--that he who died for us on the cross was both Man and God, in two distinct natures and yet in one person. We must therefore conclude that any event or fact related in Scripture, whether it pertains to doctrine, science or history, is to be accepted by the true Christian as reliable and trustworthy--no matter what modern scientists or philosophers may think of it.

God's written revelation came in an inerrant form, free from discrepancies or contradictions; and this contributes to its achieving its saving purpose. If there were genuine errors of these kinds, going back to the original manuscripts of the Bible, it would mean that the Bible contained error along with its truth. As such it would become subject to human rejection--just like any other religious document. The validity of such criticism on the part of a human judge depends upon his own judgment. If he should reject what is true in the scriptural record, simply because it seems to him unlikely or improbable, then he is in danger of eternal loss. Therefore the charge of self-contradiction or factual error is a challenge to be taken quite seriously; it cannot be brushed off as a matter of minor consequence. What is at stake is the credibility of the Bible as an authentic revelation from God.

It should be observed that in a court of law, particularly in a criminal case, the trustworthiness of a witness is a matter of prime importance. The attorney for the opposing side will make every effort to prove that the witness on the stand cannot be believed in regard to his testimony, because he is not a truthful person. The cross-examining attorney may put various kinds of questions to the witness in an endeavor to trip him up in a discrepancy, and thus triumphantly show to the jury that in one contradictory statement or the other the witness must be lying. Even though it pertains to a matter not directly germane to the case, the jury's confidence in the reliability of the witness' statement is necessarily shaken and they may reasonably reject his testimony relating to the matter under litigation. It is for this reason that antisupernaturalists and rationalists attack the Bible as to its overall trustworthiness, by attempting to show that the Scripture as we now have it contains various discrepancies and contradictions, and demonstrable errors in matters of history and science. They *are* as *justified* in using this procedure as is the lawyer cross-examining an adverse witness. For this reason there is no such thing as an inconsequential error, so far as the Bible is concerned. If any part of it can be proved to be in error, then any other part of it--including the doctrinal, theological parts--may also be in error. We are referring here, of course, to the original manuscripts in

brew and Greek; we make no such claim concerning later copies of those manuscripts. Nothing short of a miracle can preserve a copyist from all mistake or inadvertence of any kind.

After these preliminary observations, I come to a discussion of the nine specific examples cited by Dr. LaSor in his attempt to distance himself from the factual trustworthiness of Scripture in matters of history and science. One of these alleged problems has remained unnoticed or unanswered by the Bible scholars of bygone generations, but since they have been raised anew in the current debate, it seems appropriate to deal with them once again.

1) In 2 Samuel 10:18 we read that in his defeat of a Syrian commander named Hadoraim, David slew seven *hundred* men of their chariotry; but in the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 19:18, he slew the men of seven *thousand* chariots. Here we have a discrepancy in the MT that involves a decimal point. Yet there is nothing to prove that this discrepancy existed in the original manuscripts of Samuel and Chronicles. Decimal errors of this kind do exist in various passages of the Old Testament, due to the difficulty of making out numerals when copying from a worn-out or smudged *Vorlage* (that is, the earlier manuscript which the scribe is reproducing). It is very easy to "leave off a zero," or even inadvertently "add a zero," when copying down a number in round figures. The ancient systems of numerical notation were susceptible to this kind of mistake, for they too used decimal notations as easily confused as our modern "Arabic" numerals--or the Roman numerals too, for that matter. LaSor implies that it is generally in Chronicles that the higher number occurs (he suggests seven or eight examples of this),² but it should also be noted that there are quite a few instances of discrepancy in the other direction. Even in 2 Samuel 10:18 there is a high figure of forty thousand given for the Syrian cavalry, whereas the Chronicles parallel lists the forty thousand as infantrymen--a more credible figure. In this case, then, the exaggeration is on the side of Chronicles rather than Samuel. The same is true of 2 Chronicles 36:9, which gives the age of Jehoiachin at this accession as eight; in 2 Kings 24:8 the figure given is eighteen. Again, in 1 Kings 4:26 Solomon is said to have built forty thousand stalls for his war-horses, but in 2 Chronicles 9:25 the figure is given as four thousand. A different type of discrepancy appears in 1 Chronicles 11:11, which states that in a single engagement the Hebrew champion Jashobeam slew three hundred of the foe; 2 Samuel 23:8 makes the figure eight hundred (i.e., five hundred higher). In the case of 1 Samuel 6:19 the figure of fifty thousand seventy for the number of the men of Beth-shemesh slain by the Lord for their sacrilege seems surprisingly high, and this may be another example of garbling the decimals in the process of textual transmission (the account is omitted in Chronicles so we have no way to check this out). By statistical count there appear to be eighteen examples of numerical discrepancy between Chronicles and Samuel-Kings; of these fully a third give higher figures in Samuel-Kings than in

² Ibid., p. 25, claiming that these are "ten times that given in the parallel account in Samuel or Kings." In point of fact, only three such cases exist: 1 Chronicles 19:18, 21:25, and 2 Chronicles 2:10 (in the latter two of which the items being counted seem to differ); cf. J. B. Payne, "The Validity of Numbers in Chronicles," *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin*, New Series, 11 (1978).

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Chronicles.³ In the light of these facts, the charge that the author of Chronicles exaggerated numerals in order to enhance the glory of ancient Israel seems ill-founded (LaSor does not mention this theory, but he is doubtless familiar with it as set forth by Henry Preserved Smith back in the 1890's).

2) The second discrepancy pertains to the genealogy of Christ as given in Matthew 1 and in Luke 3. It is true that from the reign of David and onward the lists of ancestors differ. More links are given in Luke than in Matthew. But it was anciently understood by the church fathers that Matthew's list referred to the line of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, whereas Luke's list gave the lineage of Mary, his mother.⁴ There seems to be no valid reason for rejecting this interpretation of the matter, and it seems a bit strange that LaSor would even mention it.

3) In Acts 7:16 Stephen states that the bones of Joseph were laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor in Shechem (actually there is good textual evidence for the variant, "the sons of Shechem"). But in Joshua 24:32 the remains of Joseph are said to have been laid in a plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem. Does this not amount to a mutually exclusive contradiction? Not necessarily. We have a parallel case in regard to the well of Beersheba, which Abraham dug. Then for seven lambs he bought from King Abimelech of Gerar the rights to the land in which it was dug (Gen. 21:22-31). Nevertheless, because of the nomadic habits of Abraham and his family, it later became necessary for his son, Isaac, after his father's decease, to confirm his ownership by a sacrificial covenant-sealing ceremony (Gen. 26:26-33) with Abimelech (possibly a son named after the father who had dealt with Abraham). Apparently the old Abrahamic well had been stopped up by hostile tribesmen or else it had caved in from natural causes. But at any rate the circumstances were such that Isaac found it expedient to reestablish his right to a well which had belonged to Abraham. This being the case, there seems to be little difficulty that Jacob encountered a similar problem in asserting his ancestral rights to the burial field near Shechem. During his extensive sojourn there (Gen. 33:18-20) he had occasion to buy again the plot in which he pitched his tent, as we are told in Genesis 33:19. Stephen was aware of the tradition that Abraham had originally purchased this property, and so he saw fit to mention it, even though there is no explicit mention of Abraham's purchasing it in the Genesis account. Yet it is significant that Shechem was the region where Abraham erected his very first altar after migrating to the Holy Land from Ur (Gen. 12:6-7).

4) In regard to the angels that appeared by the tomb of Jesus on the Easter morning, LaSor points out that Matthew (28:5) mentions only one angel, and likewise Mark 16:5, who refers to him as a "young man" dressed in a white robe. But Luke 24:2 specifies two angels, and likewise John 20:12, where

³2 Chronicles is higher; in 7 the parallel is higher; Payne, "Validity of Numbers."

⁴A tradition demonstrable back to the fifth Christian century, if not earlier, IDB, 2:366.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned as having seen them both. These differing accounts add up to a discrepancy or contradiction, according to LaSor. Again we must answer that this is not necessarily the case. Several other instances occur in the gospels where one account mentions two men, whereas others refer only to one. For example, in Matthew 8:28 we are told that *two* demoniacs came to meet Jesus when he landed near Gadara; Mark 5:2 and Luke 8:27 refer to but one of them. Apparently the more aggressive and articulate of the pair was the one named Legion; the other man played no particular role in the conversation with Christ. The same is true of the encounter with Bartimaeus outside of Jericho. Matthew 20:29 indicates that there were two blind men who petitioned Jesus for their sight; Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35 refer to Bartimaeus alone. Apparently he was the more vocal of the two. So also in the case of the angels, only Luke records that there were two who appeared to the three women at their first approach to the empty tomb of Jesus. John 20:11-13 adds that Mary Magdalene came back to the tomb a second time, after Peter and John had been there. It was then that she saw and talked to both angels as they sat by the tomb. Matthew indicates that it was the same angel who caused the earthquake, rolled back the stone door, and frightened away the guardsmen, who spoke to the three women at the first approach. A careful comparison of the four accounts yields the results that there were actually two angels involved, although the miracle-working angel may have been the more prominent of the two. There is no demonstrable discrepancy here.

LaSor's fifth example, or category of examples, has already been dealt with under item No. 1 on the number of chariots in 1 Chronicles 19:18, for it deals with the alleged general tendency of the Chronicler to give numbers higher than the corresponding number in Samuel or Kings. And so we come to his sixth problem. (6) Matthew 27:9 attributes to Jeremiah a quotation from Zechariah 11:13. But this again is not too difficult a matter to clear up. It is true that Matthew 27:9 quotes partly from Zechariah 11:13: "So I took the thirty shekels of silver--that price at which I was valued by them--and threw them to the potter." But it is also true that Matthew goes on to specify the *field* of the potter. Zechariah makes no mention of the field, and yet this is the main point of the quotation, in the light of the preceding context relating to the purchase of a burial plot for paupers (Matt. 27:6-8). Only in Jeremiah do we find prominent mention of the potter's field near Jerusalem (Jer. 19:2, 11). Jeremiah also mentions the purchase of a certain field for a specified number of shekels (Jer. 32:9). We therefore have here a conflate of Zechariah and Jeremiah, rather than a quote from Zechariah alone. In cases like these, where more than one Old Testament author is quoted, the practice of the New Testament writer was to refer to the more famous of the two. Compare Mark 1:2-3, where a conflate quotation is taken from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. There it is only Isaiah who is referred to by name. The procedure is the same as in the case of Matthew 27:9.

(7) 1 Kings 6:1 states that the Exodus took place 480 years before the commencement of Solomon's temple--which comes out to about 1446 B.C. for the exodus. Yet Exodus 1:11 refers to the city of Ramses as the scene of the slave labor of the Israelite slaves, and this implies that the exodus must have taken place after 1300 B.C., when Rameses the Great became king. LaSor seems to imply that the 1446 date is supported by 1 Kings 6:1 alone, yet this

is by no means the case. In Judges 11:26 Jephthah is quoted as stating to the Ammonite invaders who challenge the rights of Israel to the territory just to the north of Moab: "While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its towns, and in Aroer and its towns . . . 300 years, wherefore did you not recover them within that time." Since Jephthah had his career well before the time of King Saul, he must have made this statement to the Ammonites around 1100 B.C. If Israel had been in possession 300 years by that time, the conquest of Canaan must have taken place in 1400 or earlier. Add 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and this comes out to a date shortly before 1440 B.C. Paul states in Acts 13:19-20 that God gave the Israelites the land of Canaan for a possession until the time of Samuel, for a period of 450 years. This indicates that the interval between the exodus and the end of Samuel's career was about 450 years. David's reign in Jerusalem began about 1000 B.C.; add 450 years and you come out near 1446. The reference to the city of Ramses is not strong evidence for a 1290 date for the exodus. Admittedly, if the exodus took place in 1290, and Moses was 80 years of age at that time, and if the work on the city of Ramses took place before Moses' birth--then there is no conceivable way in which there could have been a city of Ramses named after Rameses the Great back in 1370 B.C.--long before Rameses was born! If the name "Ramses" is not a later modernization of the city of Tanis or Avaris--as it may well have been--we may suppose that the name "Ramses" was current before the 19th Dynasty. The name Ramose (close in spelling to the Egyptian for "Ramses") occurs as the name of a nobleman in the reign of Amenhotep the Third,⁵ and there is good reason to believe--as Dr. William Albright suggested--that the name was already current in the Hyksos period, before Moses' birth in 1526. LaSor is under the impression that there was no building going on in the Delta region (where Goshen was located) back in the time of Thutmose III, and yet the early chapters of Exodus indicate that there was extensive construction work going on within commuting distance from Goshen. A more careful examination of the archaeological data demonstrates that Thutmose III (1482-1447) maintained a palace in the Delta, in which his son, Amenhotep II was born, and from which the young prince used to ride out to the pyramids of Gizeh for target practice with his bow. Thutmose boasted in his obelisks of being "Lord of Heliopolis;" and he erected those obelisks in front of temples which he built there (Heliopolis was located near the site of the modern city of Cairo in the lower Delta). There are other archaeological factors which make the Rameses II date an impossibility, and render the Thutmose III, Amenhotep II, period the only possible option for the date of the exodus.⁶ What LaSor has brought up under this heading furnishes no embarrassment to the theory of historical inerrancy in the biblical record.

(8) The next example is first suggested; and then it is withdrawn, as constituting a very minor problem, or no problem at all. That has to do with the measurements of the bronze "sea" of holy water which was installed in the court of Solomon's temple. 1 Kings 7:23 states that the diameter of this enormous laver was 10 cubits, and its circumference was 30 cubits. If it was indeed a perfect circle, the circumference must have been slightly larger,

⁵G. L. Archer, "An Eighteenth Dynasty Rameses," *JETS* 17 (1974), pp. 49-50.

⁶*Ibid.*, *A Survey of OT Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1974), pp. 223-234.

since the relationship of circumference to diameter is 3.14159. But LaSor rightly recognizes that this is no serious problem whether the 30 cubits is intended to be an approximate number, rounded off from 31.4 cubits, or whether it represents the ratio of the radius to the 6 chords that would have measured the inside of the circumference.⁷

(9) LaSor criticizes Harold Lindsell's handling of the problem of Peter's three denials of Christ in the garden of the high priest.⁸ Dr. Lindsell seems to be relying principally upon the work of Johnston M. Cheney of Oakland, California, who came to the conclusion that there were no less than six denials on Peter's part as he fended off the accusations of the hostile henchmen of Annas and Caiaphas. In this particular instance I must confess that I too find this suggested solution unsatisfactory, for the Gospel records refer to three denials, and Christ required Peter to reaffirm his love for him only three times in that memorable interview by the Sea of Galilee recorded in John 21. But a questionable interpretation of the data cannot qualify as a demonstrated error in the text of the original manuscript of the four Gospels.

As we compare the accounts in the four Gospels, which supplement one another and give us a fuller, composite picture of this whole episode stage by stage, we come to the following results. (1) On the eve of Peter's failure Jesus warned him, "Before the cock crows twice (only Mark 14:30 includes "twice") you will three times deny knowing me (Mark omits "knowing"). There is no contradiction in these four accounts, even though Mark alone includes one detail and omits another. (2) Peter was admitted to the outer court of the high priest after John had spoken to the doorkeeper, who may have been a male (although *thyroōros* can be either gender). He then sat down in the court (Matt. 26:69) near a fire (Luke 22:56); but the girl who was doorkeeper on the inner side began to look intently at Peter and finally blurted out: "You too were with Jesus, the Galilean from Nazareth." (Luke summarizes this: "You were with him!") "Aren't you one of his disciples?" (John 18:17). Peter replied, "I am not!" (3) Peter then wandered off into the porch of the building itself, but he continued to draw attention even there. Another servant-girl said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene" (Matt. 26:71). She had probably picked this up from her friend, the female doorkeeper, who confirmed to the bystanders: "He certainly was one of them" (Mark 14:69). At this, one of the male bystanders leveled the accusation directly at Peter, saying, "You are one of them!" (Luke 22:56). Peter had by this time joined a group of people who were standing about a charcoal fire (a different fire from the one in the outer court, mentioned earlier), and so they too chimed in with the question, "Are you one of this fellow's disciples?" Peter answered, "I am not!" (4) Somewhat later, perhaps an hour after that second denial (Luke 22:59), a man who was a relative (John 18:26) of Malchus (the man whom Peter had wounded at Gethsemane) spotted him, and he shouted, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" You certainly must have been with him, for you are a Galilean" (Luke 22:59). The other bystanders then took up the accusation, saying, "You are certainly one of them, for you are a Galilean (Mark 14:70).

⁷According to his more extended comments, "Life Under Tension," p. 27.

⁸*The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 174-176.

You must be, for you talk with a Galilean accent!" (Matt. 26:73). At this Peter began to panic, and so he started cursing and swearing, "By God, I don't even know who you're talking about!" (5) As soon as he had uttered these words, Peter noticed that a rooster was crowing. Then he recalled with shame that Jesus had warned him the night before after his boast of faithfulness unto death: "Before a cock crows twice, you will deny me thrice." It is not clear whether this was the first time or the second that the rooster had crowed, by the time Peter noticed him. But it is certain that if it was only the first time, the triple denial had taken place before the second crowing as well! Thus we may piece together the various details in the four accounts and we do not come out with any genuine discrepancies or contradictions.

(10) LaSor's final objection is likewise leveled at Dr. Lindsell's reasoning, rather than at a discrepancy in the Scripture itself. He refers to Lindsell's comment that the Bible speaks in "phenomenological language"⁹--which he accepts as a true dictum. But then he goes on to challenge Lindsell's statement that "the ancients" were not teaching that the sun revolves around the earth when they used this phenomenological language. He suggests that they really did believe that the sun did the orbiting rather than the earth (as we now know from the science of astronomy). He then adds, "At this point it seems to me that Lindsell is himself placing something above Scripture, namely modern scientific knowledge and theory."

It appears that Dr. LaSor has left out of consideration the dual authorship of Scripture as he voices this criticism. I am at a loss to know why he does this, because I feel sure (on the basis of 16 years of fellowship with him on the Fuller faculty) that Bill LaSor does believe that God is the ultimate Author of the Bible, even though he employed human prophets and apostles to write down what He had revealed to them. Now if we believe that God is the creator of all the phenomena of creation and the controller of all of the laws of physics, then it must follow that there is no contradiction or discrepancy between the operations of nature and the revelations of Holy Scripture. How fully and completely the ancient human authors of the Bible understood such matters as the rotation of the earth and its yearly revolution around the sun can only be conjectured. Under the influence of God the Holy Spirit, Moses may have understood a good deal more than LaSor gives him credit for. But what Moses or the prophets or psalmists understood by the words they wrote down under inspiration is quite secondary to the question of what God himself meant by those words. From that standpoint it is quite proper for us to speak of the language of Scripture as being phenomenological (even today everyone uses the geocentric terms "sunrise" and "sunset") without incurring the accusation of putting modern science *above* the authority of Scripture! If God is the author of the data of science and the author of the revelation of Holy Scripture, there can be no question of putting true science "above" the Bible. It is simply a question of using the increasing knowledge of physics and astronomy or biology or geology--whatever the science may be--to understand more perfectly what the Divine Author meant by the terms he caused the human authors to use when matters of this sort were being discussed. God does not and cannot contradict Himself!

⁹ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

Turning now from Dr. LaSor's article in *Theology, News and Notes* to a similar chapter in Dewey M. Beegle's *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*, we shall examine his Chapter 8: "Inerrancy and the Phenomena of Scripture."¹⁰ Here he discusses 11 passages which he considers damaging to the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy (only one of which, the Acts 7:16 passage, was brought up by LaSor). We will deal with them in the somewhat random order in which he presents them.

1) Jude 14: "Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying" The problem here is that Jude has not drawn from any Old Testament source, but apparently from the pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch, for 1 Enoch 93:3 quotes Enoch as saying: "I was born the seventh in the first week, while judgment and righteousness still endured." It may be inferred, therefore, that Jude really thought that *Enoch* derived from the Antediluvian patriarch himself, rather than from a late Intertestamental period. Beegle poses the question thus:¹¹ "Is it possible that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the Israelites knew of this oral tradition and yet failed to mention it? Hardly. It is equally difficult to show that God preserved the material by an oral tradition distinct from Abraham and the people of promise."

In reply let it be said that the detailed dialogue between Adam and Eve and the serpent in Eden, and the comments of Yahweh Himself were without any question preserved by oral tradition for thousands of years before they were ever reduced to writing. Whether we date Adam in 10,000 B.C. or a few millennia later, there was far more of a time interval involved than between Enoch and Jude! Nor can the report of Enoch's prophecy be said to be any less preserved by the "people of promise" than were the remarks of Adam, Eve or Cain, which were finally written down by Moses in the late fifteenth century B.C. There is absolutely no reason why pseudepigraphical works, like the Apocryphal works, may not have included some facts and reports which were historically accurate. Furthermore, it is certain that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew far more about the deeds and words of their forebears, even from the time before the Deluge, than has been recorded for us in Genesis. For the most part, no more has been recorded for us concerning the words of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob than is essential for their personal biography as they were involved in the pivotal experiences of their career. The same is true of many other prophetic figures, such as Elijah and Elisha in the books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings. It would be wrong to suppose that they had prophesied anything else than what appears in that record--their words would surely have been recorded.

2) Jude 9 speaks of the Archangel Michael contending with Satan over the body of Moses after his decease. Beegle remarks: "Joshua and the prophets never refer to any such struggle, so there is no biblical reason, aside from Jude's allusion, for believing in the actuality of the story." The underlying assumption seems to be that Jude had no other valid source of information but the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Although his writing was inspired, he enjoyed no advantage over us twentieth century Bible students in regard to episodes from Moses' time. Furthermore, he apparently feels that actions or

¹⁰Dewey M. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 175-197.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 178.

statements referred to in Holy Scripture must appear more than once in the Bible in order to be trusted. This line of reasoning seems all the more strange from one who seems to accept John 3:16 as authentic and trustworthy, even though it occurs only once in the Bible. Beegle appears to apply his criteria very selectively--only as it suits his basic purpose, which is to prove the Bible to be in error.

3) Beegle condemns as mistaken the figures given for the reign of King Pekah of Israel, who is said in 2 Kings 15:27 to have begun to reign "in the 52nd year of Azariah" and that he reigned "in Samaria for 20 years." Since Pekah did not begin to reign in Samaria until the death of Pekahiah, son of Menahem in 739, a 20-year reign would end up with 720, or a year or two after the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been carried off into captivity by the Assyrians. And of course the 720 date leaves no room for the 9-year rule of Hoshea, who lost his throne in 723 or 722. Beegle shows familiarity with the solution worked out by Edwin Thiele in his "Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings," that Pekah may well have laid claim to the throne of Israel at the same time Shallum or Menahem seized power in Samaria, even though Pekah's domain may have been restricted to Gilead until he made some kind of a deal with Pekahiah, and secured an appointment in the army which gave him access to the king's person. Then, according to 2 Kings 15:25, he invaded the king's quarters with 50 loyal Gileadite henchmen and murdered him, installing himself as the rightful and legitimate king in Samaria. Beegle, however, insists that the doctrine of inerrancy requires us to interpret v. 27 in a way that would make out the biblical author to be clearly in error. Verse 27 ends with the statement, "Pekah . . . became king over Israel in Samaria 20 years." In point of fact, as the author of 2 Kings makes abundantly clear, Pekah occupied the city of Samaria for only the last 8 years of his 20-year reign. Beegle makes this interesting assessment of the biblical author:¹² "The scribe who composed 2 Kings 15:32 was working up his synchronisms . . . about 125 to 150 years after the fall of Samaria." (Be it noted that in assigning the composition of 2 Kings to the 570's B.C., Beegle fails to explain the 8 instances of the phrase "unto this day" which occur throughout the book, with the clear implication that the Southern Kingdom of Judah is still in power, prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587. Beegle continues: "This slip may appear a bit foolish, but the scribe in Judah knew nothing of B.C. or A.D. and of the specific numbers we are using as dates." This comment leaves no doubt whatsoever as to Beegle's concept of the authors of the Bible. They had no guidance or control whatsoever from God the Holy Spirit, so far as avoiding error was concerned. They could make such obvious and ridiculous mistakes as to make them ridiculous in the eyes of modern historians. We are left to wonder how such bunglers ever got to write the books of the Bible!

Fortunately, however, we are not compelled to interpret 2 Kings 15:27 in exactly the way Dr. Beegle does. From the standpoint of the official government position at the time of Pekah's death, Pekah had been the only legitimate king of Israel during the entire 20 years, from 752 to 732. The reigns of Menahem and his son Pekahiah, from 752 to 740, were mere usurpation. Although Pekah was confined

¹²Ibid., p. 183.

¹³For details see my *SOTI*, rev. ed., p. 289, footnote.

to Gilead for the first 12 years, he claimed the throne of Israel, and he regarded Samaria as his rightful capital, from which he had been unjustly excluded. Just as David is said in 1 Kings 2:11 to have reigned over Israel 40 years, even though during the first 7 years his authority was limited to Judah and Simeon only--so also Pekah's official reckoning was "20 years in Samaria." It was only natural for the contestant who ended up victoriously in the dynastic struggle to claim the legitimacy of his throne for the entire period since his first coronation in Gilead. This was quite in keeping with standard ancient practice. King Thutmose III of the Egyptian 18th Dynasty theoretically acceded to his father's throne in 1501 B.C. (or else, it may have been a few years later). Unfortunately, however, he was a mere infant at the time, and so his stepmother, Hatshepsut, became Queen Regent during his minority. But in the course of her regency she promoted herself to the authority and title of Pharaoh in her own right, and even set up statues of herself adorned with a royal beard on her chin! Not until 1482 (or thereabouts) was she put out of the way--whether by assassination or by illness we do not know--and so it was not until 1482 that Thutmose's actual reign began, enduring until 1447. He was effectively in power only for 35 years, yet his official reign was reckoned as beginning in 1501, for a total of 48 or 49 years.

4) The Reign of Hezekiah. Dewey Beegle rightly points out that there is a discrepancy between 2 Kings 18:1 ("In the third year of Hoshea . . . Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign") and the 13th verse of the same chapter: "Now in the 14th year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them." The 3rd year of Hoshea was no later than 728. Apparently Hezekiah was installed as viceroy at that time (a frequent custom in Judah), and his father Ahaz lived on until 725, when Hezekiah became sole king. The 14th year of his reign therefore would be either 714 B.C. or 711, depending upon which *terminus a quo* is chosen. But Sennacherib did not come to the throne in Nineveh until 705, and according to his own annals, the invasion of Judah took place in 701. Therefore it must have been in the 24th year of his reign rather than the 14th. How are we to account for this discrepancy? Quite obviously there has been a scribal error in the transmission of the decade numeral. If the *Vorlage* (or earlier model copied from) had a blurred horizontal stroke, the numeral "20" preceding the "4" would have looked like a "10" (as the numerical notations of the Elephantine Papyri clearly show). Or else, if the number was fully spelled out, the difference between the Hebrew for "fourteen" and the Hebrew for "twenty-four" consisted in the mistaking of a *mem* for a *he*--just one letter (according to the spelling that prevailed in Isaiah's time). It is for this reason that E. J. Young in his Commentary on Isaiah, vol. ii, 540-542, concludes that this is the most likely explanation for the mistaken reading in 2 Kings 18:13. It should be noted that the author of 2 Kings everywhere else concurs with a 728 date of accession for Hezekiah (rather than the impossible 715 advocated by Edwin Thiele and some other conservative scholars). That is to say, 2 Kings 15:30; 16:1-2; 17:1; and 18:1, all support 728 in the clearest possible fashion, and the textual correction from "14" to "24" is all that is needed to harmonize all the data on this subject. Here again, then, no convincing case can be made out for a mistaken in the original manuscript.

5) Genesis 5 and the Genealogical Table for the Antediluvian Patriarchs. Beegle labors the point¹⁴ that the formula followed by the Hebrew authors: A became the father of B at such-and-such an age, lived such-and-such a number of years afterward until he dies--really compels us to the conclusion that this chapter teaches that the human race began at a very recent point in time, between 3760 B.C. according to Jewish tradition, and 4004 according to Ussher. He argues--with some justice, perhaps--that it was not until the development of geological science and geochronology that evangelicals began to revise their interpretation of Genesis 5 to allow for gaps in the genealogical chain. He then raises the challenge: "But how did this relate to the intent of the author?" The clear assumption here is that Genesis 5 was authored by a naive, unscientific human author who did not know any better. But if 2 Peter 1:21 is not mistaken in its affirmation that the Old Testament authors were holy men who were borne along by the Holy Spirit as they wrote, then we do have to reckon with the intent of the Divine Author as well as the human author, even in regard to Genesis 5. We have clear evidence in Luke 3:36 that there was at least one gap in the similar genealogy found in Genesis 10:24: Cainan the son of Arphaxad. Genesis 10:24 simply states that Arphaxad was the "father" of Shelah. Compare also Matthew 1:8, which states that Joram "begot" Uzziah--although from 2 Kings we know that Jehoram was the great-great-grandfather of Uzziah. Careful study of the actual usage of the Hebrew and Greek terms for "father" and "beget" reveals that they signified nothing more definite than being in the direct line of ancestry. Perfectly clear in the gospel record is the fact that Jesus was addressed by suppliants as "Son of David," even though he was not born over 960 years after David died. 1 Chronicles 7:13 similarly lists Bilhah's grandsons as being her "sons." It is highly significant that neither Genesis 5 nor Genesis 10 contain any long date which totals up the entire period between Adam and Noah, or between Noah and Abraham. Such long dates are found in connection with the date of the commencement of Solomon's temple (i.e., 480 years after the exodus under Moses), and in connection also with the length of the Hebrew sojourn in Egypt (430 years according to Exod. 12:40); likewise the entire interval between the founding of the Northern Kingdom in 931 B.C. and its demise in 721 as 390 years (Ezek. 4:5). But there are no such totals given in connection with the pre-Abrahamic genealogies.

6) Acts 7:4--the age of Terah when Abraham left Haran for Canaan. According to Genesis 11:26 Terah was, according to Beegle, 70 years of age (a highly debatable inference, as we shall see), and finally died in Haran at the age of 205 (Gen. 11:32). But Genesis 12:4 specifies that Abraham was 75 when he migrated to Shechem in the land of Canaan. On what grounds then could Stephen claim in Acts 7:4 that Abraham did not leave Haran until after his father died? This would mean that Abraham was 130 when he made the move to Canaan, instead of 75. We can only assume that Terah lived on for a good 60 years after Abraham left him. Therefore Stephen was clearly in error, even though he was inspired by the Holy Ghost in his utterance (cf. Acts 6:10; 7:55). But on the basis of a more careful examination of the evidence we feel certain that it is really Dr. Beegle who is in error, not the martyr Stephen.

¹⁴Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*, pp. 186-188.

The fallacy in all of this reasoning is found in the initial premise. Genesis 11:26 does not really say that Abraham was born to Terah when his father was 70. What it does say is that Terah was 70 when he had his first son: "And Terah lived 70 years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran." It is altogether unlikely that this verse affirms that Terah became the father of triplets. There are two or three cases of twin births recorded in Scripture, but never any mention of triplets. Therefore we have to look for further evidence before we can conclude that Abram was the child who made Terah a father at the age of 70. To be sure, he is mentioned before his two brothers, but that may well have been because he was by far the most prominent and important of the three. But it is significant that Haran was the first to die (Gen. 11:28); normally the older die before the younger. As for Nahor, we are not very well informed. He is not stated to have accompanied Terah and Abram when they migrated from Ur to Haran, although his descendants, Laban and Rebekah were living up in the general region of Haran by the time of Isaac's marriage--by which time he had certainly passed away. It would normally be expected, then, that Abraham died last because he was the youngest of the three brothers. If that was the case, there is no special difficulty involved in supposing that he was born to Terah when the latter was 130 years of age. This may seem to us like a remarkably advanced age for paternity, but it should not be forgotten that Abraham was not bereaved of Sarah until he was 137, and he thereafter took Keturah to wife and had six more sons by her. He did not die until he was 175 (Gen. 25:7). Thus the case against Stephen's accuracy in Acts 7:4 collapses completely.

7) Acts 7:15-16--Where was Jacob buried, in Hebron or in Shechem? We have already discussed in connection with Dr. LaSor's item No. 3, the question of Abraham's possible role in originally purchasing the plot of land near Shechem which Jacob later had to pay for all over again, about 180 years later. We have shown on the analogy of the two Beersheba purchases that there was good precedent for this. But Dewey Beegle's objection is mainly centered on the question of where the body of Jacob was finally interred. He interprets Acts 7:16 as affirming that Jacob was buried in Shechem, whereas Genesis 50:13 clearly states that Jacob was buried in Hebron--not Shechem. Unfortunately for Beegle, however, he has seriously misinterpreted the Greek text of Acts 7:16, which is rendered by the NAS as follows: "And from there (i.e., from Egypt)--the words "from there" are supplied in italics--they were removed to Shechem, and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem." The previous verse (7:15) specifies the antecedent of "they," namely Jacob and "our fathers," that is to say, his twelve sons, the progenitors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The verb "they were removed" (*metetithēsan*) is highly significant, because it implies that the embalmed bodies of the persons involved had first been temporarily interred in Egypt, and only later--after the conquest of Canaan around 1400 B.C.--were they *transferred* to permanent tombs up in Shechem. Therefore the *metetithēsan* must be construed as meaning primarily the coffins of the twelve sons, not the coffin of Jacob himself. It was perfectly clear from Genesis 50:13 that the body of Jacob, which was never buried in Egypt, was immediately taken up to Canaan and interred in the tomb of Sarah and Abraham in Hebron. Without question Stephen himself, who includes so much of the Genesis narrative in his speech in Acts 7, was well aware of this. For this reason he did not state, as Beegle supposes he did, that *Jacob*

was transferred from Egypt to a burial place in Palestine, for *metetithēsan* is plural and therefore demands a plural antecedent, namely the twelve sons of Jacob. In his zeal to find an error, Dr. Beegle seems to have overlooked a most elementary rule of exegesis. Beyond any question the body of Joseph was at first interred in Egypt, and from there he and his eleven brothers were *transferred*, as Stephen correctly informs us, to Shechem. Joshua 24:32 states: "Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for 100 pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons." This verse does not explicitly tell us where the rest of Jacob's sons were finally interred, but it is fair to assume that most, if not all, of them were likewise buried in Shechem. Here again, then, the effort to convict Stephen of inaccuracy is a complete failure.

8) Galatians 3:17--the length of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt. In Galatians 3:17 Paul says: "The Law, which came 430 years afterward (i.e., after God's promise to Abraham and his descendants) does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void." He is making the point here that the legal code revealed and entrusted by the Lord to Moses was never intended to annul the covenant promises made to Abraham and to his seed--and to all the nations of the earth who would be blessed through Abraham's race. Now the factor which draws Dewey Beegle's attention is the age-span of 430 years. While the Septuagint Greek translation of Exodus 12:40 implies that 430 years included the entire sojourn of Abraham and his descendants both in Canaan and in Egypt, down to the time of Moses, yet the Hebrew text of the Massoretic tradition makes it clear that the 430 years was the length of the Egyptian sojourn only. Beegle rightly concludes that the Hebrew reading is the more reliable, for the increase from 70 or 75 souls to a great host of over 2 million by Moses' time is far more credible for a span of 430 years than with just 215. Yet Beegle goes on to suggest that Paul himself, who so largely quoted from the Septuagint in his references to the Old Testament, relied upon the inferior reading of the Septuagint in this case also. In other words, the interval between God's first promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 and the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai under Moses was a mere 430 years, rather than the more probable 645 years. Paul was guilty of an error in chronology, then, because he relied upon a mistaken reading in the Septuagint. He then adds this illuminating comment:¹⁵ "Evidently it seemed good to the Holy Spirit to let Paul use the traditional 430 years, without informing him that he was technically wrong and should be using 645 years, as found in the Hebrew." Here, then, we find a Holy Spirit who does not superintend the accuracy of the Scripture even when it was first committed to writing. Here we have a God who is not overly concerned about truth! The implications of this principle lead inevitably to relegating the Bible to the same class as pagan religious literature. Without any question the heathen scriptures also contain much that is true, along with all of the error which infects them. If God Himself does not concern Himself with truth--at least in the area of history--then the Bible must be submitted to the scrutiny and judgment of man in order to determine what portions of it are valid and what are invalid. No longer does God's Word sit in judgment upon man; man sits in judgment upon the Word of God.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

We cannot trust God any longer to speak the truth, or at least to guide the human authors of Scripture into truth. There is no very great difference between this position and the skepticism of Robert Ingersoll, who used every argument of this sort in order to prove that the Bible was not the Word of God at all.

In actuality, however, Dr. Beegle has wrongly interpreted the thrust of Paul's remark. Paul is not telling us here what the time interval was between the action of Genesis 12 and that of Exodus 20, with the first giving of the Law. In point of fact, as we examine the Old Testament record, we find that in Genesis 46:3-4 Yahweh renews His covenant promises to the aged Jacob, as he is about to go down to live in Egypt. The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all essentially the same. Moses makes this abundantly clear in his repeated reference in the book of Deuteronomy to the promises that Yahweh "swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Plainly these promises were viewed by Moses as a single package or complex. The age prior to the migration down to Egypt was the age of promise. Then ensued the Egyptian sojourn for the full 430 years. Then came the exodus under Moses and the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. Obviously Paul is saying here that the detailed legal system bestowed upon the Israelites as a constitution for their theocracy was never intended, being 430 years later than the time of the three patriarchs to whom the promises came, to annul or supersede those promises. He simply mentions the well-known interval of the Egyptian sojourn as separating the age of covenant promise and the age of Mosaic legislation. As such this was a perfectly accurate historical statement, and there is no need to come to the destructive conclusions which Beegle has drawn.

9) Mark 14:30, 72--Did the cock crow once, or twice? Unlike Dr. LaSor, Beegle does not bring up the question of reconciling the Synoptic accounts of Peter's triple denial of Christ in the court of Caiaphas, except in just one detail. In Matthew 26:34 Jesus is quoted as telling Peter that before the cock crows the next morning, Peter will deny that he even knows Him. After the third denial Peter then recalls this prediction and realizes to his shame that he has fulfilled it (Matt. 26:74-75). Luke 22:34, 60-61 has essentially the same wording. It is only in Mark 14, verses 30 and 72 that we are told that Jesus actually said, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times"--the second cock-crowing being correspondingly emphasized in the 72nd verse. This, of course, is a discrepancy, for there is a difference between "once" and "twice." But Beegle then adds in a somewhat patronizing fashion: "But what essential difference is there if the other Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, follow the general tradition of the cock's crowing just once? All three Gospels contain the historical features necessary to convey the truth of the matter."

But there is really no discrepancy here at all. Three witnesses to any incident remember an assortment of details slightly different from one another. Two eyewitness accounts of the same episode may summarize or generalize in some particulars, and become quite specific and detailed in others. One Gospel writer recalls that there were actually two wild men from Gadara who encountered Jesus; another Evangelist mentions but one, since he was the spokesman. One Gospel mentions Bartimaeus alone (Mark 10:46) as begging Christ for the gift of sight when He visited Jericho; Matthew 20:30 recalls

that there were actually two, although Bartimaeus acted as the spokesman. As for Christ's Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem, Mark 11:2 mentions only the donkey colt as the beast upon which Jesus sat. But in Matthew 21:2 the detail is added that the colt was tied up next to its mother--so that there were really *two* donkeys involved. This is a common phenomenon in the Gospels, and can be instanced frequently in the parallel passages of Kings and Chronicles in the Old Testament. Similarly also, Mark recalls (perhaps reflecting the way Peter dictated his account of the episode, if indeed Mark was his understudy in Rome, as tradition holds) that Jesus actually said, "Before the cock crows twice." Matthew and Luke leave out the twice, but simply say, "Before the cock crows." Well, if the cock crowed twice, he at least crowed once. Furthermore the verb "crows" (*phōnēsai*) does not specify whether that bird is going to sound forth once, twice or thrice before Peter will have perjured himself for the third time. The New Testament uses as one term for the break of day the term *alektrophōnia*, or "cockcrowing" (Mark 13:35). Were you to ask a native what exactly that term meant, he would certainly have answered, "Why, that is the hour when the roosters crow and herald the approaching sunrise. Hence we can only say that Mark is more specific than Matthew or Luke at this point, but there is no real contradiction between them.

10) 1 Corinthians 3:19: "He catches the wise in their craftiness." Dr. Beegle points out that this quotation by Paul is taken from Job 5:13, a statement made by Eliphaz in his first speech to Job. He then remarks:¹⁶ "Traditionally speaking, Eliphaz has never been considered as inspired. Job, so it is claimed, was the inspired one. . . . Apparently Paul did not care who said it, nor whether he was inspired. The statement was true as far as he was concerned, and so he used it in his argument." Beegle then concludes that all this amounts to is an inspired or infallible account of error.

It is hard to see why Beegle bothers to mention this matter at all, as if it were a problem for inerrancy. No evangelical writer that I know of, ancient or modern, has ever made the claim that the Bible quotes as valid only the statements of inspired saints. Some of the reproaches that Job directed against God were less than inspired, and for these he was rightly rebuked, both by Elihu (Job 34:1-9) and by Yahweh Himself (Job 38:1-2; 40:2). On the other hand, many of the sentiments expressed by the three counselors were doctrinally correct; in fact Job himself declares, "I could say such things as those," and he actually does reiterate many of the sentiments they express concerning the wisdom, power, and grandeur of God. It should also be remembered in regard to this general point that God could use even so wicked a sinner as the high priest Caiaphas to express prophetic truth. In John 11:50 he is quoted as saying, "It is profitable for you that one man die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Then John goes on to comment: "But he did not say this on his own, but rather, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation." *A fortiori* Paul's quotation from Eliphaz in 1 Corinthians 3:19 poses no problem whatever for biblical inerrancy.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

11) 1 Chronicles 21:1 "Satan set himself against Israel by inciting David to number Israel." Contrast 2 Samuel 24:1: "Again the anger of Yahweh blazed against Israel when He incited David against them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" The Chronicler assigns to Satan the responsibility for tempting David to carry out the census-taking; the author of Samuel attributes it to God. Beegle suggests¹⁷ that the Chronicler felt no hesitancy in revising the text of his older source when he differed from its interpretation-- "apparently on the understanding that his understanding was more accurate. It is obvious that he simply did not believe that God incited David to take a census in order to express his anger against Israel." Beegle takes note of the traditional harmonization of the two, to the effect that *Samuel* speaks of the permissive will of God merely. But then he speculates that had the two authors met together, they would have engaged in vigorous debate over the subject. He winds up with this comment: "Although it is difficult to prove an error, it is evident that partial truth is involved in the interpretations. There are numerous biblical examples of theological interpretations of one generation being revised slightly or even rejected by another." Unfortunately he gives no examples of these other "numerous examples." Had he done so, they would very likely prove as ill-founded as this one.

In this case we are dealing with a recurring situation in God's dealings with a stubbornly unbelieving or disobedient people. The Bible tells us that God may permit a believer who is out of fellowship with Him to take some action which is unwise or displeasing to God, in order that after he reaps the bitter fruit of this misdeed, he will undergo an appropriate disciplinary judgment and thereby be brought back in a chastened spirit to a closer fellowship with the Lord. This certainly was the case with Jonah, who tried to run away from God's call by taking ship for Tarshish. The Lord used the storm and the whale to change him around and get him back on the path of obedience. In other cases judicial hardening took place because of earlier rejection of the truth and will of God. Romans 1:21-22 says of the decline of mankind into idolatry and immorality: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools." Then, in verses 24-25 we read: "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their heart to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie." At the same time it is also the special interest of Satan to encourage and intensify every impulse of man to disobedience toward God. He is always on hand to help. A classic passage on this interplay between the permission of God and the malignity of Satan is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, which states that in the last days before the Second Coming of Christ the "lawless one" will be revealed, "whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan." Then we read (v. 11): "And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all might be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." In the latter part of David's reign, then, both the king and the nation began to take confidence in their increasing numbers and material resources to such an extent that they needed a disciplinary judgment to bring them back to a proper dependence upon God. God therefore permitted Satan to encourage David to undertake this census,

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 194-195.

after the completion of which a severe plague overtook the nation and seriously depleted their ranks. When viewed from this perspective, no genuine contradiction appears between 1 Chronicles 21 and 2 Samuel 24. Both of them were true, for both God and Satan were involved.

This, then, brings us to the end of our survey of Dewey Beegle's chapter on "Inerrancy and the Phenomena of Scripture." We have weighed all of his cited texts and found them falling far short of his announced purpose to prove the Bible guilty of mistakes--even in the autographa. It is outside the purpose of this present discussion to deal with the larger philosophical issue he raises in the other chapters in his book. Suffice it to say that his attempt to establish objective authority for the Bible once it is deemed guilty of error is a total and complete failure. A Bible containing mistakes even in its original manuscripts is, as we have already pointed out, a mere combination of truth and error which puts it into the same class as every other purported scripture composed by pagan authors as an expression of their own search after God. As such it must be subjected to the judicial processes of human reason, and in the effort to sift out the valid from the false, any human judge--whoever he may be--is necessarily influenced by subjective factors. All he can be sure of is his own opinion--and even that will change from year to year. At best he comes up with a set of conjectures and guesswork which he may dignify with the label of sanctified intuitions, or something of that sort. But he has no truly reliable, objective basis for a knowledge of the one true God, or His will for our salvation. Whether Beegle is willing to face it or not, his theory of epistemology is fatally defective, and he has no firmer grasp of spiritual truth than his own personal inerrancy of judgment may extend. To most of us there is far more prospect of security in the inerrancy of the Word of God than in the judgment of finite, sinful man.

Our final comment is this. Beegle speaks out vigorously against the principle that if a single genuine error is found in Scripture, it proves that error may be found in any other part of Scripture. He insists that any number of errors may be found in the Bible, and it still may be the Word of God. Yet the Bible itself teaches us that God is not a man, that He should lie. Beegle may see no difficulty in the proposition that God may inspire falsehood, or at least tolerate falsehood, in His holy record. But clear and honest thinking as responsible adults can only view this approach as vitiated by the law of non-contradiction. We may as well protest that a single sin demonstrable against the Lord Jesus Christ does not necessarily disprove His sinlessness, or that a single false prediction given by God does not impair His promise-keeping integrity. As Luther said, "When the Scripture speaks, God speaks." It is for this reason that we put our entire confidence in the accuracy and veracity of God's written Word, even as Jesus of Nazareth did in all of his references to the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament.

HIGHER CRITICISM AND BIBLICAL INERRANCY

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PAPER SUMMARY

Higher criticism is the art of seeing literature exactly as it is and of estimating it accordingly. It becomes negative criticism, described as "the historical critical method," when it assumes the right to pass rationalistic judgment upon Scripture's own claims about its composition and historicity. But such a method necessarily presupposes that the Bible's claims are not inerrant. It thus disqualifies itself as truly scientific criticism, since it refuses to view the object being analyzed according to its proper (divine) character. Examples are provided, both of valid and of invalid criticism, together with an evaluation of present-day attempts by negative critics to infiltrate evangelicalism with views that subordinate the authority of Christ to the judgments of men.

HIGHER CRITICISM AND BIBLICAL INERRANCY

J. Barton Payne

At the heart of today's trend among some conservative Christians to give up the full, inerrant authority of Scripture lies negative higher criticism.¹ Christ's followers need the Bible, and they know it; they do not want to lose its infallible word. But certain former evangelicals have decided that even though it means opposing Jesus' own teachings about the validity of Scripture, they just *have* to accept negative higher criticism. It is as simple as that.

DEFINITION

Are you a higher critic? Am I? Well, that all depends. . . . It depends on who is asking the question, and where. Under the proper circumstances evangelicals will reply, Yes, of course I am; under others, they will bristle at the very suggestion--though preserving love toward the questioner. So this immediately leads us to define "negative high criticism." Its three elements may be considered in reverse order.

Criticism

Stemming from the Greek root *krinō*, "to cut," and thus "to judge," the term criticism derives specifically from the adjectival form, *kritikos*, which means "fit for judging," and thus critical, in the sense of being "decisive." An illness has reached its *critical* stage at the point where its outcome is being decided. In a special way criticism relates to literature. The *Oxford English Dictionary* therefore presents this definition: "The art of estimating the qualities and character of literary artistic work." The goal of criticism is to see a writing exactly as it is, and to estimate it accordingly. It is no mere captious fault finding; and truly great art has nothing to fear from the critic; honest criticism will only enhance its inherent value.

Higher Criticism

In order to see a given writing exactly as it is, investigators are involved first of all in "the search for the original wording of the text," which is

¹As recognized, even by those who are currently seeking to combine this negative criticism with some form of biblical authority; cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p. 65, who concedes, "Historical criticism is the agent of a repeated and growing rupture of vital contact between biblical tradition and our own time;" or, more bluntly, S. T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), p. 91, who says, "The rise of biblical criticism has been an important factor in the erosion of the strength of orthodoxy in the Christian church in the past century."

the discipline of lower criticism--though this is now often designated as textual criticism.² Its primary concern is with manuscripts and textual transmission; its goal is to recover, as far as this is possible, the original wording of the biblical writings; and its practice is preliminary, but fundamental to all further investigation--hence its designation as "lower." Its sequel, then, is the discipline of higher criticism, which investigates the origin of these original texts. Higher criticism asks about the circumstances of their composition, including matters like date, place, authorship, unity and purpose, literal style, and the influence the different books may have had. It also considers how their inspiration came to be recognized and how the whole group of books were gathered together (canon formation). So does a student ask, "Who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews?" The minute he does, he becomes a higher critic!

Inquiry is what characterizes both of these divisions of criticism. Whether lower or higher, they employ a common method, that of asking questions. As Harry Boer puts it: "Both were conceived in, and have issued from, the same womb. This womb is the rational human mind."³ In his historical survey of the theological shift that has occurred at Fuller Seminary, William LaSor thus allies himself with the essence of criticism when he says: "Many of the tensions of the early days of the Seminary developed because some of us were willing to explore the implications of modern scholarship, whereas others tended to retreat to the defense of nineteenth century viewpoints."⁴ His words are, confessedly, "loaded" ones: Did LaSor's interest in modern scholarship go no farther than to "explore" it? Did his opponents who defended the traditional biblical orthodoxy even "tend" to retreat from this kind of exploration? Gleason Archer's publications, for example, hardly exemplify reticence toward interaction with the implications of liberalism. But LaSor's sympathies do correspond to our basic definition of criticism, that it is the science of inquiry. The real question, then, concerns what kind of inquiry.

Negative Higher Criticism

In his defining of terms, Harry Boer grants that the above-cited quotation from the *Oxford Dictionary* was actually its second definition for criticism and that the first is this: "The action of passing judgment upon the qualities or merits of anything, especially the passing of an unfavorable judgment . . . censure."⁵ Boer is vehement in his repudiation of this negative aspect; he

²R. N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976), p. 27; cf. pp. 101-102, where he concludes that "Lower criticism is an unhappy term . . . because of its perjorative sound;" it seems to sound unimportant or simple, in comparison with higher criticism. The very fact, however, that fewer students engage in lower criticism than in higher, witnesses to the more advanced linguistic and technical skills that textual criticism requires.

³Harry Boer, *Above the Battle? The Bible and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 18.

⁴William LaSor, "Life under Tension--Fuller Theological Seminary and the Battle for the Bible," in *The Authority of Scripture at Fuller* (Pasadena, Ca.: Fuller Theological Seminary Alumni: *Theology, News and Notes*, Special Issue, 1976), p. 26.

⁵Boer, *Above the Battle?*, p. 16.

calls it, "wholly erroneous . . . not in any sense the meaning of the term 'biblical criticism'." Yet historically, criticism has become the domain of liberalism. As James M. Robinson points out in *The New Hermeneutic*: "Liberalism and conservatism tended to divide criticism and hermeneutics between them. This in part explains why hermeneutics⁶ as a discipline has survived in conservative circles even down to the present."⁷ It also explains why "higher critic" has often come to mean simply "skeptic."

In theory, higher criticism need not be negative. Its goal is descriptive; and criticism becomes warped--that is, it "goes wrong" and fails to see a worthy object for what it really is--only when used with some sort of presupposition that turns it into dishonest criticism. But then, the question arises, what is it that constitutes a warping presupposition? Liberalism and evangelicalism come up with diametrically opposed answers, and these in turn decide whether unfavorable judgment and censure is to be passed upon Scripture.

Liberalism demands freedom. George Ladd, returning from a sabbatical on the Continent did not like what he saw, but put it this way: "German theology is . . . an adventure of inquiring minds which refuse to be in bondage to the traditions of the past. . . . It insists that only when the scholar approaches the Scripture free from all presuppositions can he really understand the Bible as an historical book."⁸ This definition forbids a man's coming to the word, knowing "in advance" that it is true. Käsemann says bluntly, "Scripture to which one surrenders . . . uncritically, leads . . . to indistinguishability between faith and superstition."⁹ The purpose, therefore, of Boer's whole book about (subtitle) *The Bible and Its Critics* is to pronounce a resounding "No!" to the question, Is Scripture (title) *Above the Battle*? The Bible is not and, he says, must not be kept exempt from attack. Liberalism insists that no other approach is to be tolerated. As H. H. Rowley once explained it:

There were conservative writers who stood outside the general body of critical scholars and who rejected most of their conclusions, but they did not seriously affect the position. For while many of them had considerable learning, they made little secret of the fact that they were employing their learning to defend positions which were dogmatically reached. Their work had little influence, therefore, amongst scientific scholars who

⁶--tics" (plu.), i.e., the clarification of the author's originally intended meaning; contrast the "new hermeneutic" (sing.), which seeks rather to constitute meaning--cf. Krister Stendahl's distinction between "what it meant" and liberalism's modern search for "what it means," "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *IDB* 1.419.

⁷James M. Robinson, *The New Hermeneutic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 15.

⁸George Ladd, "Year of Study in Germany Sharpens Perspectives," *Fuller Seminary* (January 1959), pp. 4-5.

⁹Käsemann, *Das Neue Testament als Kanon* (Göttingen: 1970), pp. 371, 407-408, in Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), p. 20.

were concerned only with the evidence, and the conclusions to which it might naturally lead.¹⁰

Yet--and this is a fact that has to be noted--Rowley's exclusivistic stress upon freedom is itself a presupposition. It thus became a matter of principle, when the crisis at Concordia Seminary was approaching in the fall of 1973, and the denominational president, Dr. Preus, offered the liberal element under Dr. Tietjen a compromise solution--whereby twenty conservative professors would be hired at the seminary--that "the proposal was received with disdain."¹¹ Liberalism simply cannot be liberal with those who would threaten its methodology through a criticism that is "biased" i.e., that assumes biblical inerrancy.

Rowley's explanation also, however, bears witness to the fact that "most of the conclusions" produced by his school of criticism ended up being rejected by the conservatives; in practice, that is, they *were* negative. Furthermore, in its very theory, the presupposition of critical freedom has to assume "in advance" an *unfavorable* judgment against Scripture. Norman Gottwald does not hesitate to put this on record; for he says, "The only presupposition common to all Old Testament critics is the necessity of questioning tradition, examining a religious literature as we would examine any other writings in order to determine authorship, date, sources, and historical background. This at once sounds the death knell for verbal inspiration." He recognizes that the Old Testament claims this kind of inspiration; but he replies, "Value judgments are inescapable. We all come to the Old Testament with some ultimate perspective, even if it is to deny the ultimacy of the Hebrew claim."¹²

Conservatism, on the other hand, demands commitment. The Protestant E. J. Young follows the Catholic Wilhelm Moeller by citing Exodus 3:5 in the preface of his Old Testament *Introduction*: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."¹³ So, after having looked into the positions both of Young and of Gottwald, Samuel Schultz concludes:

Basic among all these questions is the presupposition of the critics regarding the trustworthiness of the Bible. This is the watershed that ultimately divides them into two camps. One group regards the Bible at face value--reliable, trustworthy, and inerrant. The other group may presuppose various other positions except the recognition that the Bible is reliable throughout . . . [Instead it is] treated on the purely human level.

¹⁰H. H. Rowley, *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (Oxford University: 1951) XV.

¹¹*St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (January 29, 1974), p. 6A.

¹²Norman Gottwald, *A Light to the Nations* (New York: Harper, 1959), pp., 9, 13.

¹³E. J. Young, *Introduction*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 6.

His objection to Gottwald's liberalism is that, "For the latter the value judgment of the critic is imposed on Scripture, while for the former [the evangelical] the Scripture is accepted as the standard to which all value judgments are subjected."¹⁴ Schultz's position is that the only way to criticize Scripture--the only way really to see it as it is in history--is to refrain from imposing negative human judgments upon it. This means commitment. At the very least it means that the text should be considered innocent until proven guilty; therefore, legitimate criticism takes the text on its own terms first before attempting to impose (if ever!) modern categories over it. It also means, incidentally, that the evangelical finds himself in a bind semantically: for the moment he opens his mouth in complaint against some aspect of modern historical criticism, someone always seems to jump to his feet to defend criticism as such; and the Bible believer has to stop and explain that he is all for inquiry, but what he is against is "negative higher criticism" (cf. the opening sentence in this present essay).

LIMITS

Which presupposition, then, is the proper one: that of freedom, which produces negative higher criticism, or that of commitment, accompanied by a criticism that is affirmative of Scripture? The question becomes one of limits--of deciding just how far the critic can or should go. May he carry his task beyond that of description into one of sifting the ideas contained in the text so as to establish or to modify their truth? Liberalism says, Yes: without the right to sift, and to reject what seems unworthy, the critic cannot be true to himself, and criticism is a farce. Evangelicalism says, No: by claiming the right to sift, the critic cannot be true to the divinely inerrant nature of the biblical literature which is under scrutiny, and criticism is misapplied. If, therefore, a proper decision is to be reached, the limits that are at issue may be accurately defined.

The Nature of the Limits

When Rowley as a biblical scholar contended for his freedom to follow wherever the evidence "might naturally lead," and when Gottwald decried anyone's imposing different limits (on his treatment of religious literature) from the way he would "examine any other writings," both men thereby limited Scripture to a naturalistic category. Yet the observation of Gerhard Maier has been that "The concept that the Bible must be treated like any other book has plunged theology into an endless chain of perplexities and inner contradictions."¹⁵ The reason for this goes back to the kind of limit that the former two scholars imposed. As George Ladd said, in following up his description of those adventurous Germans who were seeking to understand the Bible as an historical book:

¹⁴Samuel Schultz, "Today's Critic--Presuppositions, Tools, and Methods," *BETS* 3 (1960), pp. 37-88.

¹⁵Maier, *End of the Method*, p. 11, in which he assigns the origin of this approach to Johann Semler.

They interpret the Bible from within the presuppositions of the contemporary scientific world view. Such a world view *assumes* that all historical events are capable of being explained by other known historical events. In other words, what we call the supernatural is not the immediate activity of the living God; for it belongs to the area of legend and myth and not to the area of historical reality.¹⁶

So which will we choose: to limit the Bible, and thus also the Christian faith, along with God Himself, or to limit the critic? Although Peter Stuhlmacher bitterly opposes the anti-critical stance of his former protege, Maier, he still concedes the truth of the latter's insistence that negative criticism damages theology; for he acknowledges that, "A historical criticism of the biblical tradition which is *unchecked* [italics mine] . . . can allow irreconcilable fronts to emerge between scientific insight on the one hand and vital Christian faith on the other."¹⁷

The pattern that exists between "checks" and today's higher criticism can be laid out by means of the following charts. Their goal, if we assume a proposition that "x did y," is to plot the legitimacy of both affirmative and negative evaluations of this proposition, in a variety of literary contexts.

1. In a *non-inspired* book:

EVALUATION of "X did Y"

I know it's true

I know it's not true

LEGITIMACY

A man CAN say this

He CAN say this too

(And liberalism assumes the same attitude toward the Bible)

2. In a *supposedly inspired* book, which would contain both

natural matter

and supernatural:

I know it's true

He CAN say this

He CAN'T tell

I know it's not true

He CAN say

He CAN'T tell

(As an example of a natural matter in a supposedly inspired book, let us say that X = Joseph Smith and Y = his translating of a Roman period Egyptian funerary text on Osiris, which he converts into words of Abraham about Isaac. With our present knowledge of Egyptian literature, anyone can judge this assertion, that "X did Y," and say it either is true or isn't."¹⁸ But neither the liberal nor the evangelical is in a position,

¹⁶Ladd, "Year of Study," p. 5.

¹⁷Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁸Cf. W. P. Walters, "Joseph Smith Among the Egyptians," *JETS* 16 (1973), pp. 25-45.

in himself, to make judgments, if the category be supernatural. Let us say further that X = an angel called Moroni and Y = his speaking to Mr. Smith. Who am I to say whether there really was an X, that did, or did not, do Y? [Only some other supernatural source has the right to guide me] [and He may!] So when the liberal claims he CAN judge the supernatural, he is actually bringing it down to his own level and thus denying, in advance, its reality. Criticism has "gone wrong" by adopting a presupposition that is opposed to the potential character of the object being judged.)

3. In *Scripture*, with its content, both

	<u>natural</u>	<u>and supernatural:</u>
I know it's true	He <u>CAN</u> say this	He <u>CAN</u> say this too (because some other supernatural source, Christ, validates Scripture)
I know it's not true	He <u>CAN'T</u> say this	He <u>CAN'T</u> say this (because Christ has said Scripture cannot be broken, John 10:35 ¹⁹)

(Further, the evangelical says he CAN'T judge, negatively, even the natural elements in Scripture. Let us say, for example, that X = Matthew and Y = his quoting (27:9-10) words from Zechariah 11:12-13 [with possible allusions to Jer. 18:2 and 19:2], ascribing them to Jeremiah the prophet.²⁰ When the believer says he CAN'T deny this, he does so on the basis of a presupposition--that the claims of the book as real as a starting point, and hence that all Scripture is inerrantly true (see Christ in John 10:35 again)--but not of a presupposition that destroys criticism. For, rather than eliminating, or even claiming to have answered the few such cases that do occur,²¹ the evangelical simply transfers these seeming discrepancies into the supernaturalistic column. He places them where man is not to judge for himself, and where God [who is the only One in a position to know] denies him the privilege of saying, "It's not true," because God tells him that Scripture is inerrant.)

¹⁹Cf. Chapter 1 above: "Christ's View of Scripture."

²⁰One of six parade examples of phenomenological difficulties that are raised against biblical inerrancy by S. T. Davis, *The Debate*, pp. 102-104.

²¹Negative critics may assert otherwise, that, "Actually they (the biblical narratives) abound in errors, including many contradictory statements," M. Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: 1946), p. 44; but cf. Chapter 4 above: "Supposed 'Errors' in the Bible." While evangelicals, however, can and do receive encouragement from the relatively few discrepancies that remain unanswered by today's increased knowledge, it is still important to caution that Christian commitment to Scripture does not depend upon their infrequency. It is not as though the discovery of additional problems would thereby alter the basis for the evangelical's belief, i.e., our understanding of Christ's authentication of Scripture.

So, in regard both to the liberal and to the evangelical, the establishing of limits is a matter of faith: either in one's own, internal competence, or in another's (Christ's) external authority.

The Scientific Approach

Without the least hesitancy, Rowley equated the practice of negative higher criticism with what is done "amongst scientific scholars." By *scientific* he meant, as pointed out by Ladd, being faithful to that contemporary scientific world-view which explains all events on the basis of other known events. Stuhlmacher classifies this "rationalistic notion of history and reality" as an outworking of "the principle of analogy. . . . All historical experiences which resist rationalism [as it observes analogous incidents] are subject to skepticism."²² His classification is a legitimate one, being accepted, for example, in R. N. Soulen's current *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, which explains:

The term Historical Critical Method refers to that principle of historical reasoning . . . that reality is uniform and universal, that it is accessible to human reason and investigation, that all events historical and natural occurring within it are in principle comparable by analogy, and that man's contemporary experience of reality can provide the objective criteria by which what could or could not have happened in the past is to be determined.²³

But is a criticism of Scripture that is based on analogy the truly scientific approach? Gerhard Maier immediately raises philosophical objections: "How can the *pure* historian without further ado reject something just because it happens only once? What can be experienced and what has analogies can certainly not be declared synonymous."²⁴ E. J. Young goes further and raises the following theological objection against

the so-called "scientific" method, which assumes that man can approach the facts of the universe, including the Bible, with a neutral mind, and pronounce a just judgment upon them. It is time that we cease to call such a method scientific. It is not scientific, for it does not take into consideration all the facts,

²²Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism*, p. 62.

²³Soulen, *Handbook*, p. 78; cf. N. H. Ridderbos, "Reversals of Old Testament Criticism," C. F. H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), p. 348, where he objects: "Scholars seem to think they can go to work with an objective, scientific method; in other words, in these respects it seems the Old Testament must be handled as any other book."

²⁴Maier, *End of the Method*, p. 16.

and the basic fact it overlooks is that of God and His relation to the world which He has created.²⁵

On these same grounds Maier has entitled his most recent study, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*; and he concludes, "Because this method is not suited to the subject, in fact even opposes its obvious tendency, we must reject it."²⁶

In place of the "analogy" method, N. H. Ridderbos refers to the oldest portions of Scripture and proposes: "In order to come to a proper historical understanding of the events of Moses' time, we must take reckoning of the personal intervention of Yahweh, of which the sources bear witness, and work out a scholarly historical method that takes account of this intervention."²⁷ What then does constitute a truly scientific approach? If biblical revelation cannot be placed in Mr. Analogy's test tube for repeatable experimentation, so to make "natural" evaluations--as is done in reference to the data found in the physical sciences--what course should one follow: It would appear that biblical criticism can be conducted only upon the basis of the testimony of competent witnesses--as is the procedure in any other historical discipline. We cannot infer from analogous events today what must have transpired centuries ago. In respect to religious phenomena, Soulen goes so far as to conclude: "If in fact every event in history is in some sense unique, of what value is the principle of analogy?"²⁸ Accepting then the principle of "testimony by competent witnesses," we find that God Himself, through Christ (John 1:18), becomes the only authority who can really tell us about His own writing.

This principle, moreover, admits of no compromise. There are those today--ranging from certain of the more thorough-going critics, such as Stuhlmacher or Boer, down to some more neo-evangelical opponents of biblical inerrancy, such as Maier²⁹ or Davis--who appeal for a genuine openness to transcendence

²⁵Young, *Introduction*, pp. 6-7; cf. Soulen, *Handbook*, p. 78, "If the Historical Critical Method by definition rules out the Divine as a causative factor in history, of what help can it be to the Church in understanding the Bible, which views God and history in precisely that way?" Maier, *End of the Method*, p. 39, concludes: "Divine intervention . . . and a Scripture brought into being by God's Spirit cannot predeterminately be captured in a law of analogy to a this-worldly event."

²⁶Ibid., p. 25, cf. p. 49.

²⁷Ridderbos, "Reversals of Criticism," p. 348.

²⁸Soulen, *Handbook*, p. 78.

²⁹Maier defends Scripture, even in such matters of alleged scientific error as the sun standing still over Gibeon or the rabbit chewing its cud, *End of the Method*, p. 70. The inaccuracy of a recent review of his book, which claimed that, "His suggested way of . . . exegesis does not seem to differ greatly from that suggested by his former mentor," Stuhlmacher (W. W. Gasque and C. E. Amerding, "Both Testaments," *Christianity Today* 22 [1978] 700), becomes apparent when one observes Stuhlmacher's own repudiation of Maier's "pietistic . . . half-hearted criticism," *Historical Criticism*, pp. 69-71. Yet Maier still concedes the possibility of contradictions within Scripture, that "God would have to put up with them," and specifically rejects inerrancy in favor of "infallibility," *End of the Method*, pp. 55, 70, 71.

and who repudiate the use of the historical critical method when it binds itself totally to antisupernaturalistic philosophical presuppositions (such as underlie Bultmann's demythologizing of the New Testament),³⁰ but who still employ negative higher criticism to reject those lesser aspects of Scripture that they happen to find objectionable, either historically or theologically (such as Joshua's religiously based destruction of the Old Testament Canaanites³¹). While Stuhlmacher therefore pleads for a "hermeneutics of consent"--by which he means an openness to one's hearing the word of God--he is in fact calling only for historical criticism's being willing to engage in a "critical dialogue with the tradition" of Scripture.³² Human rationalism still sits in judgment over the results. The principle of the analogy of modern secular thought retains at least partial control, and methodologically it might as well be total! A truly open-minded scientist, on the contrary, must be willing to operate entirely within whatever methods are appropriate to the object of his criticism; or his conclusions will inevitably go wrong.

The alternative method, which is both self-consistent and also scientifically congruous to its subject matter, has been forthrightly defined by Maier: "The correlation or counterpart to revelation is not critique but obedience."³³ This principle is what made James Orr's inductive attempt to construct a doctrine of inspiration upon the basis of his own evaluation of the observable phenomena of Scripture, with all its various difficulties, basically illegitimate; and it is what made B. B. Warfield's approach of deductively deriving biblical inerrancy from the revealed teaching of Christ and His apostles, sound. Evangelicals, in other words, do not insist upon Warfield as though this latter scholar were immune to criticism, as those who resist inerrancy sometimes insinuate, but simply as one whose methodology is consistent with the object of his investigation.

It is important at this juncture to distinguish rationalism from rationality. While evangelicals deny the former, they would not wish to minimize the latter, namely, the God-given significance of human intelligence, nor to inhibit those areas of thought that are pertinent to man's Spirit-directed exercise of his own rational responsibility: first, in examining the historical (resurrection) data that lead him to an acceptance of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-11); then, in seeking an exact understanding of what his Lord taught, specifically concerning Scripture (Luke 24:45); and, lastly, in interpreting with diligence the truths therein contained (2 Tim. 2:15). But evangelicals do deny the right of a man to contradict whatever it is that God may have said that He has said. To do this, he would effectively

³⁰Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism*, pp. 54-55, 61-62.

³¹Davis' No. 1 difficulty with biblical inerrancy, *The Debate*, pp. 97, 126. Yet in almost the same breath he insists, "There are philosophical assumptions that some biblical critics make about the Bible--e.g., that supernatural events such as resurrections and other miracles are just not the sort of things that happen--that lead them to . . . unacceptable conclusions," *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³²Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism*, pp. 83-85.

³³Maier, *End of the Method*, p. 35.

establish some other criterion over God Himself, which amounts to nothing more nor less than idolatry.³⁴

Standards

Having established, philosophically, that the truly scientific approach to biblical criticism is the way of obedience--indeed, of total obedience--to the witness of Jesus Christ, the evangelical is still obligated to formulate, hermeneutically, definite standards for marking off the limits between critical procedures that are legitimate and those that are not.³⁵ At the outset, as an extension of the descriptive task of biblical introduction, it may be assumed that for a given portion of Scripture any theory about the circumstances of its literary origin is acceptable which adequately incorporates the biblical data and proceeds to develop its conclusions from them. Stuhlmacher thus appears to have some basis for his opposing Maier's strictures against form-criticism, except for permitting its analysis of canonical hymns and parables.³⁶ After all, the form-critical study of Deuteronomy as a 1400 B.C. Hittite variety of suzerainty testament has done much both for the Book's understanding and for its authentication to this very period.³⁷ But once any theory moves away from description into evaluation, if it begins to adopt a negative stance toward that data which it is supposed to be explaining--by seeking to sift out the erroneous from the valid, the false from the true, and the superstitious from the divine--at that moment it has gone beyond its tether and placed itself in opposition to the standards of Jesus. His teachings touch upon the following two categories:

Biblical statements about its own composition. Who wrote down the book of Job? I don't know! In light of his other wisdom writings, a case can be made for Solomon;³⁸ but neither the words of Christ nor of Scripture in general contain statements that bear up on this aspect of higher criticism. The evangelical scholar is left to his own rational resources. The same holds true for the whole subject of textual transmission, within the division of

³⁴J. B. Payne, "Apeitheo: Current Resistance to Biblical Inerrancy," *BETS* 10 (1967), pp. 5-6.

³⁵Negative critics have been quick to fault evangelicals for imprecision in this area; cf. Boer, *Above the Battle?*, p. 42: "There is an undefined point on the higher critical scale--varying from one evangelical community to another--beyond which, by virtue of some mystical consensus, critical inquiry may not go;" or Stuhlmacher's charge that Maier has inadequately solved the hermeneutical problem of Scripture exposition in the church, because his concept "of a spiritual, self-evident Bible exposition within the circle of the reborn . . . came to grief a hundred times in church history," *Historical Criticism*, pp. 69-70.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 70, though in Maier's defense it should be noted that what he approved was the examining of "certain literary forms, *such as* hymns, prayers . . . parables . . . *and the like*," *End of the Method*, p. 84.

³⁷K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1966), pp. 91-96.

³⁸G. A. Archer, *Survey of OT Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1975), pp. 459-460.

lower criticism, where, as Maier put it, there is only one course: "The comparison of variants must be carried out critically, that is, with reasonable and intelligent standards."³⁹ The advocates of negative criticism have, it is true, claimed that this "lets the cat out of the bag." Barth's more left wing colleague, the neo-orthodox theologian Emil Brunner, argued that, "Once textual criticism had been accepted it was soon discovered that the text might need to face a far more searching criticism, [involving] . . . inconsistencies or contradictions in the Bible;"⁴⁰ and Boer's chief argument supporting freedom for higher criticism is its inseparability from the lower variety: "The two . . . are so interrelated . . . that it is impossible to use the one properly without acknowledging the legitimacy and necessity of the other." He asks, "If the consistent use of lower criticism is . . . praiseworthy and even necessary, why is the consistent [i.e. negative] use of higher criticism regarded with suspicion and antipathy?"⁴¹ The answer, however, lies in this necessary standard of conformity to the Bible's own statements. Maier says, "Textual criticism does not infer criticism of the text but refers to critically *finding* the text." Stated concretely, when we ask whether one should follow MSS A,B,C and D, in omitting the "Amen" at the end of Matthew (28:20, quoting the Great Commission), or MSS E,F,G and H, in adding it, this all forms a part of that legitimate textual endeavor to recover, as closely as possible, the wording of Matthew's autograph; and neither he nor any of the other apostles included within their inspired statements directives (predictions!) about those MSS that should start being copied four centuries later. We are free to engage in criticism as best we can. But when we ask whether one should follow redaction criticism, concerning the Great Commission's formula for baptism "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (28:19), and when we conclude "that at some point the tradition of Matthew expanded an original monadic formula . . . to make Jesus' teachings meaningful to their own *Sitz im Leben* rather than to present them unedited,"⁴² this would be an illegitimate negative higher critical

³⁹Maier, *End of the Method*, p. 80.

⁴⁰Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), p. 274. When Brunner, however, went on to accuse the orthodox Hodge-Warfield position of "apologetic artifice,"--saying that it claimed "The Bible 'at present' was not free from errors, but the 'original' text was perfect . . . [and] was still the same Bible . . . although it was very different from the present one"--he was being unfair, in two ways. On the one hand, evangelicals do not claim great textual differences, but usually make quite a point of how very few (and insignificant) the passages are whose wording now remains in doubt. On the other hand, they do not claim a need today for the same perfect Bible originally given by God: evangelicalism refuses to base its commitment to the inerrancy of the Scriptural autographs upon needs of any sort, whether of God (as if He *had* to ordain inspiration along with revelation) or of man (as if we *have* to have anything more than a reasonably adequate guide to salvation)--except for that general need of maintaining the truthfulness of Jesus Christ, cf. Payne, "Apeitheo," p. 8.

⁴¹Boer, *Above the Battle?*, pp. 18, 29.

⁴²G. R. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission," *JETS* 19 (1976), pp. 80, 84.

endeavor if it raises questions against the reliability of Matthew's autograph, once this has been textually recovered. For the apostle does include within his inspired statements directives, both about who said this (28:18, Jesus) and what were the circumstances of its verbal composition (28:17, uttered in Galilee, on a mountain, to the eleven disciples who had witnessed His resurrection); and we are committed to the validity of God's inerrant word.

Two aspects of biblical introduction are especially involved within this standard of upholding Scripture's statements about its own composition: its claims of authorship and its claims of integrity. A significant illustration of the former aspect appears in the following concession made by a critical expositor in a previous generation. For in asserting that the latter part of Isaiah was not really authored by that particular prophet, George Adam Smith wrote, that if Christ had made use of Isaiah's name in His citations from chapters 40-66, "as, for instance, is the case of David's name in the quotation made from Psalm 110, then those who deny the unity of the Book of Isaiah would be face to face with a very serious problem indeed."⁴³ Refraining for a moment from our discussion of the Isaianic problem (see Old Testament below), we must observe nonetheless that for those who are committed to Christ and to the standard of what the Bible says about its own composition, any denial of the Davidic authorship of the 110th Psalm ceases to be a viable option, even as a critical possibility.

As an illustration of the latter aspect, i.e., concerning the integrity of the biblical books, we refer to Samuel Sandmel's denial of the authenticity of the conclusion to the prophecy of Amos. He says, "It has come to be accepted among free biblical scholars . . . that the section is an addition. . . . Of course, religious conservatives reject entirely any supposition that there are such additions . . . on the premise that the initial words of a biblical book, in this case, 'The words of Amos,' are a complete guarantee of its authenticity."⁴⁴ Yet what other premise could one entertain about the intention of the compiler of this book in its final form? And here we must recall the status of the compiler (presumably Amos himself), who, in any event, is the

⁴³George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah (The Expositors' Bible)*; New York: Hodder & Stoughton: n.d.), p. 2.6. Thus, for example, in a listing of the differences that caused the split at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, when the (more liberal) faculty maintained that "The Book of Isaiah may have two authors," the denominational president laid down as the historical position of Missouri Synod Lutheranism, "Whatever the Bible says about the authorship of certain books in the Bible is to be accepted without question," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (January 26, 1974), p. 1A.

⁴⁴Samuel Sandmel, *The Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Knopf, 1963), pp. 56, 55. As a further illustration, not simply of a disregard for the biblical statements about authenticity, but even of a perverting of them, cf. R. H. Pfeiffer's denial of Jer. 46-52: "Since the editor of this book compiled his collection with the intention of including it in Jeremiah's book, as shown by his titles in 46:1, 13; 47:1; 49:34; 50:1 . . . it is obvious that the edition of Jeremiah's book circulating at that time did not contain a series of [such] foreign oracles," *Introduction to the OT*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1948), p. 506.

ultimate instrument through whom God's Holy Spirit works in inspiring a given biblical writing. Sandmel's "of course" testifies to his awareness of this; but he simply is not committed to the truth of what he recognizes to be the Scriptural claim.

The biblical content, accepted in its historicity. A closely related standard, which sets further limits upon the degree to which the critic is left free to exercise his own rational resources, is this: no theory of literary origins may be considered legitimate that calls into question the historicity of the biblical content that it is seeking to explain. The following three examples apply to successive portions of the book of Genesis, analyzed in increasing detail; they also concern three different subcategories found within present-day higher criticism; and all three illustrate how critical methods which were supposed to provide students with clearer insights into the nature of the biblical literature concluded by creating historical discrepancies where the biblical text itself had not suggested such.

Genesis 1-11 is a record of the origin of the world, preliminary to the accounts of the patriarchs. Form criticism seeks to discern the various blocks of materials, often existing as oral traditions, that may underlie this record. Gene Tucker's handbook distinguishes one such *form* as "saga," which he defines in this way: "Saga frequently reports things which are incredible, while history reports the credible. Saga may speak of the direct intervention of God in the affairs of men, but when history speaks of God it is only as the ultimate cause of everything." He then concludes, "Genesis is for the most part a collection of sagas."⁴⁵ Yet by assigning the first book of Moses to this form-category, he automatically downgrades the historicity of its content (one could even wonder if he might not have already entertained certain presuppositions about the nature of history before he defined his forms) (!); and, he acknowledges:

The results of such analysis often are taken to be entirely negative, and in certain cases they are, in the sense that the historical reliability of some material has been called into question. But such an analysis can lead to a positive reassessment. [In] saga . . . primitive peoples ask questions about the world and produce answers which, though incorrect, are interesting.⁴⁶

Genesis 28 is the record of a theophany granted to the patriarch Jacob at Bethel. Tradition history seeks then to trace out how various elements or forms were brought together to produce the present narrative. Walter Rast explains, "Tradition historians propose that these episodes . . . reflect localized cult legends;" and he proposes: the pillar "may have had a prehistory of Canaanite worship" and the heavenly ladder "was probably a ziggurat." Yet "at some point the tradition of the Bethel theophany has interpreted it as . . . underscoring God's special care for the patriarch. . . . But even this is not the end . . . the latest meaning of the tradition becomes part of a pledge

⁴⁵Gene Tucker, *Form Criticism of the OT* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 30.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 20, 31.

which embraces the descendants of the patriarch as well."⁴⁷ As a result, what Scripture now says about Bethel is almost totally divorced from what may "really" have happened there.

Finally Genesis 37:28, in its present Hebrew text, is a record of Joseph's brothers and how "There passed by Midianites, merchantmen; and they drew and lifted Joseph up out of the pit and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they brought Joseph into Egypt" (ASV). Still a third specific approach to the biblical material is that of literary criticism, which seeks to recreate certain written sources that are said to underlie the present text; and long ago S. R. Driver applied Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis to this passage. Being unwilling to grant that the Midianites could be included under Ishmaelites (cf. Judg. 8:24), he divided up verse 28 and assigned the first part--"There passed by Midianites . . . and they lifted Joseph up out of the pit"--to an assumed "E" document separated from the "J" matter that precedes and follows it. By so dividing the verse, however, he created discrepancies, not simply by positing two different groups to whom Joseph was supposed to have been sold according to the two sources, but also by removing the brothers from this part of E's record, so that the "they" is made to "refer to the Midianite merchants passing by, who drew up Joseph from the pit without his brothers' knowledge."⁴⁸ But what then really happened? Was Joseph lifted up and sold by his brothers, or was he lifted up and kidnapped by the merchants? Who can say--except that, as the result of a process of literary dissection, the historicity of one part (and perhaps both parts) of the verse has been denied; and higher criticism has ended up rejecting the truth of the biblical content that it was supposed to clarify.

EXAMPLES

The following section approaches five of the areas that are most discussed today within Old Testament and New Testament criticism. Its purpose is not that of presenting a comprehensive treatment, but is rather one of applying the standards that have been proposed (see Standards above) and of suggesting the limits within which a truly scientific critic, who respects the nature of his divinely inspired subject matter (see The Scientific Approach above), may freely exercise his rational judgment.

Old Testament

Basic to all Old Testament study is Pentateuchal criticism. Specifically one asks, Of just what does the Mosaicity of these "five books of Moses" consist? Scripture suggests three ways in which the concept may be understood. (1) If by Mosaicity we intend to list those portions that were inscripturated, written down, by the hand of Moses himself, such a concept would embrace the following sections:

⁴⁷Walter Rast, *Tradition History and the OT* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), pp. 47, 49-50.

⁴⁸S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the OT*, 8th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), pp. 17-18.

Passage:	Wellhausen's "document"	Biblical Claim of Mosaicity:
Exod. 17:8-13	E	Exod. 17:18
Exod. 20:22-chapter 23	E	Exod. 24:4
Exod. 34:10-26	J	Exod. 34:27
Lev. 18:5	H (in P)	Rom. 10:5
Num. 33:3-49	P	Num. 33:2
Deut. 5-30	D	Deut. 31:9
Deut. 32:1-42	D	Deut. 31:22

On the one hand, it must be recognized that these amount to less than 32 chapters out of the total of 187; for the remaining 5/6 of the Pentateuch, scholars who are committed to the truthfulness of the record are not bound to hypotheses of Mosaic inscripturation. Yet on the other hand, this tabulation does demonstrate that Moses wrote sections that appear in all of Wellhausen's various "documents," each of which is supposed to have had its distinctive style; and the very fact that the New Testament states that Moses wrote down Leviticus 18:5, even though this truth is not indicated in the text of the Pentateuch, suggests that he may have authored considerably more, which is not so indicated either. Yet (2) the term Mosaicity may refer to those parts which were composed by Moses--whether actually written down by him or not--such as the address in Deuteronomy 1:6-4:40 or the song in 33:2-29. Assuming the accuracy and inspiration of those who finally compiled the books of Scripture, we realize that this category is for all practical purposes, equivalent to the first.⁴⁹ Still, it does mean that the rest of the words, which do not claim that Moses spoke them, have no need to be attributed to him; and these include such difficult passages as the observation that Moses was the most humble man on earth (Num. 12:3) or the description of his death (Deut. 34). Even for such, however, it must be said, (3) that later Scripture teaches a generally Mosaic character that marks the Pentateuch as a whole. Jesus equated the Old Testament with "Moses and the Prophets" (Luke 16:29; cf. 24:44 or Mark 12:26), and the Chronicler speaks of "the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses" (2 Chron. 34:14; literally, *by the hand of Moses*). The Pentateuch, therefore, including even Genesis (which makes no internal claims about its authorship), must be seen, in a very real sense, as constituting "the five books of Moses:" datable to his period, and produced under his direction, perhaps with the aid of the 70 elders (Num. 11:16-17, 24-25) or of Joshua (27:18-20). The critical theory of a small Mosaic "core" of writings, supplemented over the centuries by various redactors, is specifically refuted by Pentateuchal laws forbidding just such additions (Deut. 4:2, 12:32). Old Testament scholars are thus free to speculate about pre-Mosaic "forms" or

⁴⁹J. B. Payne, *An Outline of Hebrew History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), pp. 66-67.

documents to their hearts' content, provided only that they do not thereby bring into question the historical claims of the biblical contents, e.g., through proposals of disharmonious double recordings or of contradictory strata (so that "J," for example, teaches a 40-day flood and "P" one of 150 days). Most exegetes, however, seem to lose their interest in higher criticism when confronted by these divinely imposed limits; yet it was our Lord Himself who insisted that, Moses "wrote of Me," and added, "But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:46-47).

One of the so-called "assured results of modern criticism" is the denial to Isaiah of chapters 40-66, which conclude the book that bears his name. Without going into the internal arguments, about which a great deal could be said both pro and con,⁵⁰ suffice it at this point to summarize the external (New Testament) argument; i.e., that the recorded words of Jesus remain silent, as far as assigning the material of these chapters to Isaiah is concerned; but those of His apostles do assign it to the eighth century prophet. Have we then a limit imposed upon critical speculation at this point? An evangelical such as Clark Pinnock says, No:

Spokesmen such as Schaeffer and Lindsell tend to confuse the high view of Scripture with their own interpretations of it . . . [e.g., making] a good deal out of the fact that the NT is accustomed to citing the whole book of Isaiah under the prophet's name, thus settling definitively the question of its authorship. . . . They apparently have assumed the right to foreclose on the exegetical options available as if they could somehow dictate to all other evangelicals, including those trained in biblical studies, the interpretation they must accept. Enough of that!⁵¹

Now confessedly, in passages where it is simply a matter of citing the book of Isaiah under the prophet's name, as in Mark 1:2, or maybe even in 7:6, evangelicals must meticulously avoid imposing personal interpretations upon others; but in a passage (John 12:41) where both parts of Isaiah are cited and the New Testament gives as a further definition, "These things Isaiah said because he saw His [Christ's] glory and spoke of Him,"⁵² is the denial of Isaiah's personal activity to be considered "interpretation," or is it violation of the apostolic meaning?⁵³ The issue is clear: he who is open-minded about accepting the disunity of Isaiah's prophecy is already closed-minded against accepting the inerrant authority of John's Gospel.

⁵⁰J. B. Payne, "The Unity of Isaiah: Evidence from Chapters 36-39," *BETS* 6 (1963), pp. 50-56; and "Eighth Century Israelite Background of Isaiah 40-66," *WTJ* 29-30 (1967-1968), pp. 179-190, 50-58, 185-203.

⁵¹Clark Pinnock, "The Inerrancy Debate Among the Evangelicals," *Authority at Fuller*, p. 13.

⁵²Cf. the "Summary of the NT Evidence" in E. J. Young, *Who Wrote Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1912), p. 12.

⁵³J. B. Payne, "Ethical Issues in the Responses to *The Battle for the Bible*," *Presbyterion* 3 (1977), p. 102.

A third area within Old Testament criticism where current differences between the free (negative) and the committed (positive) approaches to the subject become most apparent is that of the prophecy of Daniel. Representing the former approach, R. H. Pfeiffer was candid in expressing himself about both of the standards that have been proposed above for establishing the limits that are appropriate to biblical criticism. Concerning historicity of content, he asserted flatly: "Such miracles as the revelation to Daniel of the details of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and their meaning (2:19), the divine deliverance of . . . Daniel from the lions (6:22-24), and a hand without a body writing a message on a wall (5:5), lie outside the realm of historical facts." Concerning then the book's own statements about its sixth century, exilic composition, he adds: "The historical background of Daniel, as was discovered immediately after its publication, is not that of the sixth but the second century. . . . In dating an apocalypse such as Daniel, the period in which the seer is said to have received the revelations is entirely irrelevant."⁵⁴ Pfeiffer, with almost all of today's negative critics, thus relegates the book's author to legend and its predictions to the time of the Maccabean revolt, specifically to 165 B.C. Yet Christ's words in Matthew 24:15-- "When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet . . ."--testify to His belief, not only in the historical seer, but also in an accomplishment for his predictions that was still future in A.D. 30.⁵⁵ To this very day I can recall my shock when I mentioned these facts to a critically minded friend and he replied, "I know more about Daniel than Jesus did." But it does dramatize how the lines are to be drawn concerning appropriate biblical criticism.

New Testament

If one were to select similarly crucial areas for New Testament study, he would probably turn to the historicity of John's Gospel, with its preincarnate divine Logos, or even to that of the Synoptics, with their Son of Man Christology. Harry Boer, for example, complains: "All that we know of . . . the words of Jesus in which he expressed his teaching we know through *reports* [italics his] of the four evangelists . . . the same kind of human medium through which the rest of the Bible comes to us"--though he does eventually salvage enough facts to conclude that "Jesus again and again accommodated himself to existing beliefs which we no longer accept."⁵⁶ For the purpose, however, of illustrating legitimate boundaries to higher criticism, reference to the following two books may prove to be particularly instructive.

Ephesians has suffered more consistent criticism than has any other epistle found in the Pauline corpus--that is, except for the Pastorals--but all of

⁵⁴Young, *Introduction*, pp. 755, 764.

⁵⁵As is recognized also by negative critics; e.g., "The early Christian exegesis followed the Jewish interpretation in finding the desecration of the sanctuary, end of ch 9, in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, an interpretation followed by Jesus himself in expecting the future setting up of the 'Abomination of Desolation,'" *ICC, Daniel*, p. 62.

⁵⁶Boer, *Above the Battle?*, pp. 96, 95.

this has not necessarily been negative. The question, "To whom was it written?" is a matter belonging to lower criticism: most MSS (including A, D, and G) insert within 1:1 the explanation, to the saints who are "in Ephesus;" but the earliest and best MSS (including N, B, and P⁴⁶) omit the latter two words. That is to say, Paul's inspired autograph, as best we can reconstruct it, was blank at this point. Critics are thus free to consider Ephesians as an encyclical letter, perhaps (if it happened to be directed, among other churches, to the group of Laodicea) as the very letter referred to in Colossians 4:16.⁵⁷ The question, however, "By whom was it written?" is a matter belonging to higher criticism: all the MSS say, "Paul" (1:1, 3:1); cf. the apostle's personal references that follow (3:2-8). There is thus no question among critics about what the inspired autograph said, only about whether or not it is true. Most scholars today, through the application of rationalistic induction to the style and content of Ephesians, have adjudged it to be spurious and have assigned it a date near the close of the first century, a generation after the apostle's death⁵⁸--a conclusion obviously impossible for those who are committed to its divine trustworthiness.

The single most assured denial made by modern New Testament criticism concerns that of the apostolic authorship of 2 Peter. Even such moderate critics as B. M. Metzger relegate this epistle to the second century, "long after Peter's lifetime."⁵⁹ Here again, however, without going into the pros and cons of the argument, suffice it to note that this book does not simply claim to be the words of "Simon Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), and allude to his personal experiences with Jesus (1:12-14), but explicitly bases the authority of its teaching upon the reality of its author's having been one of the three human eyewitnesses to Christ's transfiguration (1:16-18). One's choice between Petrine authenticity and pseudepigraphic fraud rests once again upon the limits that are recognized as legitimate for the criticism of the inerrant word of God.

EVALUATION

In light of the relationship sustained between higher criticism and biblical inerrancy, as this has been outlined above, Christians will ask, "How should we then live?" (Ezek. 33:10). Four particular factors, moreover, seem to demand the practical attention of those who would live in conformity to Jesus Christ.

Tension

Evangelicals need to be aware first of all of the seriousness of the conflict that exists between negative higher criticism and biblical orthodoxy, and of its intransigence: this problem is not just about to go away. Gerhard Maier can argue "til the cows come home," alleging *The End of the Historical-Critical*

⁵⁷Such possibilities are outlined, e.g., in E. F. Harrison, *Introduction to the NT*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 331-332.

⁵⁸Cf. *IDB* 2.108-112, though also Harrison, *Introduction*, pp. 332-339.

⁵⁹B. M. Metzger, *The NT, Its Background, Growth, and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), p. 258.

Method--showing how those who reject part of the Bible on higher critical grounds are unable to reach any agreed upon stopping place, so as to preserve some "canon in the canon," and how instead, as in the case of H. Braun, "Man, who began critically to analyze revelation and to discover for himself what is normative, found at the end of the road: himself"⁶⁰--but his logic falls on deaf ears (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4). Stuhlmacher retorts on behalf of the critical consensus: "No contemporary theologian can forego the results . . . of this biblical criticism. . . . Any scientific alternative to the historical-critical method is out of the question."⁶¹ Scholarly conformity extends even to the details of the system; for as R. K. Harrison once remarked,

Driver's work established the "standard of orthodoxy" in OT liberal circles. While minor variations were permitted, an individual's academic respectability depended to a large extent upon the closeness with which he adhered to the pattern set forth by Driver. Thus there sprang up a curious liberal-conservatism which is still in evidence today in British scholarship.⁶²

But whether in detail or in essence, the commitment demanded by positive (evangelical) higher criticism simply cannot coexist with the freedom demanded by negative (liberal) higher criticism. The tension is irresolvable.

Temptation

Evangelicals, furthermore, must be aware of the resultant, perennial temptations confronting their theologians, the moment they undertake--as stated by LaSor at the outset of this study--"to explore the implications of modern scholarship."⁶⁴ Boer, for example, concedes that conservative denominations such as his own Christian Reformed Church "have traditionally adhered to the view that the Bible as God's word cannot contain inconsistencies of any kind. . . . The words infallibility and inerrancy are usually applied to Scripture." He then declares, "The evangelical scholar cannot ignore this. But he also has his [internal] academic conscience and the general [external] theological community to live with."⁶³ By his allusion the external "community," Boer is underlining that same pressure toward conformity that Harrison indicated in his reference to British academic respectability. Evangelical graduate students have sometimes sold their souls for a Ph.D. degree; and those who survive this hurdle find that when they have secured a professorship somewhere, their participation in scholarly meetings and research, subjects them to even more persistent temptations. Confronted by the ridicule, in thought or in word, of academic leaders like James Barr, who insist that ". . . where the fundamentalist takes revelation to be identical with the propositions of the biblical text . . . he is in direct contradiction with modern science; and his position can be

⁶⁰Maier, *End of the Method*, p. 35.

⁶¹Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism*, pp. 38, 20; cf. p. 59, where he insists, "The decision is irrevocable."

⁶²R. K. Harrison, "British OT Study," *Christianity Today* 5 (1961), p. 392.

⁶³Boer, *Above the Battle?*, pp. 80-81.

maintained only on the ground of simple credulity, defying everything that is thought and known . . ." ⁶⁴ Is it any wonder they should develop second thoughts about inerrancy? The key, of course, is to remember that what "is thought and known" by the unbelieving academic world is based upon that uninhibited sort of criticism which renders *itself* unscientific, by perverting rationality into rationalism, i.e., by refusing to view its biblical subject within a supernaturalistic framework, which alone is appropriate to its divine nature. ⁶⁵

Boer's allusion to the internal "academic conscience" pinpoints what probably constitutes the most basic danger of all: the factor of personal pride. Soulen's *Handbook* defines biblical criticism as "that approach to the study of Scripture which consciously searches for and applies the canons of reason to its investigation;" ⁶⁶ and S. T. Davis frankly admits: "It is true that no Christian who believes that the Bible errs can hold that the Bible *alone* is his authority for faith and practice. He must hold to some other authority or criterion as well. That authority, I am not embarrassed to say, is his own mind, his own ability to reason." This constitutes, in fact, the supreme appeal of negative higher criticism; for as Davis bluntly sums it up, "I am the final judge of what I will believe or not believe." ⁶⁷ And the scholar, whose work is constantly one of critical evaluation, faces with peculiar attraction this built-in "occupational hazard" of pride. It is not without reason that time after time Christian organizations have found their educational institutions to be the initiators and leaders in apostasy from Scripture and the most resistant to the biblical demand of "casting down every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). As long as seminary professorships are filled by human beings, the church must be forever reminding itself that eternal vigilance is the price of, not liberty (= pride), but Christian commitment (= humility--that quality which our race has ever found to be in such short supply!).

Results

Yet a most sobering antidote to the temptation of assuming critical autonomy is to look at its results, to consider the dilemmas that have been created by today's lapse into negative higher criticism. It is a heresy that affects our attitudes toward life, toward revelation, and toward Jesus Christ Himself. Biblical theologians like Otto Baab, who rejoiced that, "The breakdown of medieval authoritarianism permitted the mind of the individual biblical scholar

⁶⁴James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 202 (cf. Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), pp. 12, 15, on the Wellhausen hypothesis and its effect on conservative students.

⁶⁵Cf. Payne, "Faith and History in the OT," *BETS* 11 (1968) p. 116; and, "Biblical Inspiration: Current Issues," *The [Cincinnati Bible] Seminary Review* 17 (1972), p. 61.

⁶⁶Soulen, *Handbook*, p. 26.

⁶⁷Davis, *The Debate*, pp. 71, 75.

to examine freely and critically the documents which were the foundation of his faith," and who conceded that, "An educated churchman finds it impossible to follow the ultra-conservatives, to whom the unquestioned Bible is the very word of life," must then face the uncertainties and the vacuum in life that result. Baab continued:

Modern man's dilemma is created by this failure to find a source of authority possessing ultimate validity and capable of giving him lasting peace in his personal and collective life . . . [and] for the creation of this dilemma . . . the biblical scholar of the modern school must accept a large measure of responsibility.⁶⁸

Concerning God's revelation, the problem with which negative critics must wrestle is the inconsistency of their views with the attitudes of the very faith that they claim to follow. S. T. Davis, for example, is honest enough to admit that, "There is never any tendency in the NT to deny, question, or criticize the OT." Instead, he finds an attitude, not only of faith in general doctrines, but also of commitment to specific facts: "The historicity of events and figures described in the OT is taken for granted;" and he proceeds to list such unlikely happenings as the "stories" about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the flood, Lot's wife, Jonah and the great fish, and so on.⁶⁹ It is not at all easy to demonstrate a consistent and practical devotion toward a revelation with which you are in disagreement.

Most serious of all, the events just listed involve not simply the teachings of the New Testament, they are the teachings of Jesus Christ. Harry Boer expresses a concern "because appeal to the authority of Jesus is sometimes made to deprive higher critical study of the Bible of its legitimate place."⁷⁰ But, as his spiritual ancestor Abraham Kuyper put it, "If Christ attributed absolute authority to the Old Covenant . . . then the matter is settled for everyone who worships Him."⁷¹ It seems to boil down to this: either criticism

⁶⁸Otto Baab, "OT Theology: Its Possibility and Methodology," W. R. Willoughby, *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow* (University of Chicago: 1947), pp. 401, 403. Cf. T. C. Vriezen's later claim: "For the theologian . . . who wants to read the OT in a scholarly fashion . . . it is his critical research which will help him to sift the spiritual true from the false, the original elements from the secondary ideas." Yet he too acknowledges the inevitable results: "That the judgments arrived at will often be subjective is unavoidable, it will therefore take a long time before agreement can be reached in the Christian Church even on matters of detail. But [as he adds, with what suggests a whistling-in-the-dark indomitability] this does not release us from the obligation of striving after this agreement with patience and faith," *An Outline of OT Theology* (Newton, MA: Branford, 1960), pp. 9-10.

⁶⁹Davis, *The Debate*, pp. 58-59. Cf. F. C. Grant's oft-quoted admission that in the New Testament "it is everywhere taken for granted that Scripture is trustworthy, infallible, and inerrant," *Introduction to NT Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), p. 75.

⁷⁰Boer, *Above the Battle?*, p. 91.

⁷¹Abraham Kuyper, *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Scribner's, 1910), p. 429.

gains the place of honor or Jesus does. Some critics are forthright enough to document their hesitations toward the latter. Boer speaks of Jesus' accommodating Himself to popular beliefs that He knew were wrong;⁷² Davis seems to represent a more widely held view and speaks of His ignorance: "Perhaps he shared with the people of his day certain false beliefs."⁷³ But was this limited to just *certain* such beliefs? Sigmund Mowinckel says flatly, "He shared our imperfect insight into all matters pertaining to the world of sense. . . . He knew neither more nor less than most people of his class in Galilee concerning history . . . geography, or the history of biblical literature."⁷⁴ Where, then, does this leave the worship of Jesus? J. I. Packer's dictum seems valid, that "Any view that subjects the written word of God to the opinions and pronouncements of men involves unbelief and disloyalty toward Christ."⁷⁵

Strategy

Confronted in this way by today's anti-Christian higher criticism and by its pervasive dominance within the academic community--including educational institutions, learned societies, and scholarly publications--evangelicals must be alert to what can, and to what cannot, be achieved. In regard to liberalism and its disciples who lead the negatively critical movement, the battle must be fought in the area of pre-understandings. In the words of R. K. Harrison, "It seems abundantly clear that all future scholarship must adopt a more critical attitude toward its theoretical presuppositions;"⁷⁶ parts I and II of Gerhard Maier's *End of the Historical-Critical Method* thus serve as noteworthy examples of this kind of essentially philosophical refutation of the assumption of rationalistic autonomy. It is this which must precede any positive presentation of what he styles the "historical-biblical method"--more often called, the "grammatico-historical method." Put more concretely, until a scholar becomes willing to accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ over his life and thought, it is futile to try to argue him out of Wellhausen's literary analysis of the Pentateuch; to the naturalistic mind-set, it is the only viable option. We may occasionally twist the lion's tail by showing, for example, how Daniel's third empire has the four-fold character of Greece (7:6, 8:22) and not the two-fold character of Persia (7:5, 8:3, 20), with which liberalism identifies it; but we should labor under no illusions that this will perhaps persuade a negative critic to give up his antisupernaturalistic (Maccabean) understanding of Daniel in favor of a supernaturalistic (Roman) one. No way!

In regard to evangelicalism, the words with which the OT scholar N. H. Ridderbos admonished it 20 years ago still bear repeating:

⁷²Boer, *Above the Battle?*, pp. 95-96.

⁷³Davis, *The Debate*, pp. 123-124.

⁷⁴Sigmund Mowinckel, *The OT as Word of God* (New York: Abingdon, 1959), p. 74.

⁷⁵J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1958), p. 21; cf. Payne, "Apeitheo" 13-13, and, in the present study, Paper No. 3: Inerrancy and the Authority of Christ.

⁷⁶R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the OT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 82.

Two dangers especially are present. The first is that it may fall short in its regard for the authority of God's Word [the very point stressed in the second evaluation, "Temptation," p. 5.21 above]. But another danger is that orthodox OT scholarship exists in too great a degree on the reaction against OT criticism. Even though the critic often presents analysis of the books of the Bible in an unacceptable manner, this does not necessarily mean that every analysis thereof must be rejected. How can evangelicals keep from overreacting?⁷⁷

Our own strategy must be thus, first of all, one of awareness: both advanced students and lay people need to be fully informed about the nature and potentialities of higher criticism. We must then be prepared for its guarded acceptance or for its categorical rejection, depending on circumstances. As indicated above (see Standards, p. 5.11), a thorough biblical criticism is not only permissible but is desirable and, indeed, necessary, provided that it studiously refrains from violating the Bible's statements about its own composition or its contents as concerns any aspect of their historicity. Provisos of this sort are, of course, anathema to the proponents of uninhibited criticism, who equate such restrictiveness with "the exclusion of any serious critical study of the Bible." Boer thus goes on to complain, "The historical evangelical view of Scripture takes no serious account of the findings of higher criticism except insofar as these are compatible with its basic presuppositions."⁷⁸ How right he is! If Romans 5:12-14 says that through one man, Adam, "sin entered into the world, and death through sin," then so long as evangelicals remain committed to apostolic authority, just that long they cannot be open-minded, even to consider critical theories that suggest to the contrary. It is high time that believers behave more consistently in their rejection of negative criticism. Enough of those book reviews that seek to carry water on both shoulders, acknowledging the inerrancy of Scripture, and yet courting academic prestige by extolling each new treatment of the myth of Adam's sin as more "stimulating," more "intriguing," and more of a "scholarly feast" than the last!

This introduces a final element that is becoming more and more necessary for recognition within evangelical strategy, and it concerns equivocation. The battle for the Bible, as Harold Lindsell reminds us, is no longer limited to a conflict between the advocates of negative higher criticism "out there" in institutionalized liberalism and the advocates of biblical inerrancy "in here" among professing evangelicals. Those who sign annual teaching contracts, or Evangelical Theological Society membership cards, affirming the inerrancy of the Scriptural autographs, are often those most liable to the insidious temptations of the rationalistic critical method. Harry Boer therefore puts his finger on "the evangelical scholar . . . [who] resolves the conflict by

⁷⁷Ridderbos, "Reversals," p. 350.

⁷⁸Boer, *Above the Battle?*, p. 101. He further observes, "When critical or secular scholarship discovers data that supports the biblical record, these are widely and gladly used. When discovered data call the biblical record into question at any point, there is no comparable concern to enter into dialogue."

bowing verbally in both directions." But if Boer detests such ambiguity as "conducive neither to theological clarity nor to theological integrity,"⁷⁹ how much more should true evangelicals rise to the defense of their Christian heritage. Nobody wants to be a witch hunter. But if an advocate of negative higher criticism raises his head in any pulpit, classroom, publishing house, or board chamber over which the committed Christian has a God-given voice or vote, he must waste no time, but must obey his Lord, who says "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13); or, should discipline for some reason or other become impossible, the alternative remains equally clear: "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins" (Rev. 18:4). It may be that some former evangelical has come to feel that he just has to accept the dictates of today's criticism. It is a tragedy. It is a renunciation of the mind of Christ. It is a heresy from which we must protect the people of God for whom we happen to be responsible. It is a challenge for us to pray for the erring one and with tears, with words, and with love to seek to woo him back to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 81.

LEGITIMATE HERMENEUTICS

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PAPER SUMMARY

Only by maintaining the important distinction between meaning (that *single* idea represented by the text *as meant by the human author* who received God's revelation) and significance (which names a relationship which exists between that single meaning and the reader, a situation, or an idea) may Scripture be delivered from the hands of its enemies and its friends. The current crises in the doctrine of Scripture is directly linked to our poor procedures and methods of handling Scripture. Three principles of general hermeneutics are balanced off with three especially troublesome issues for twentieth century believers from the area of special hermeneutics: the implications of relating the single meaning of the text for those who live and read that text in different times and cultures. Five current bypasses used by some interpreters to escape this key distinction between meaning and significance are also examined and found wanting.

LEGITIMATE HERMENEUTICS

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

Much of the current debate over the Scriptures among believing Christians is at its core a result of a failure on the part of evangelicals to come to terms with the issue of hermeneutics. Because those living in our century have been occupied with many other battles, usually not of our choosing, one issue that should have claimed our attention was neglected. Consequently, while many evangelicals may find a large amount of agreement on the doctrines of revelation, inspiration, and even canonicity, something close to a Babylon of voices is heard on methods of interpreting the Scriptures.

However, evangelicals are now being pressed on several sides to attend to this missing part of the theological curriculum. The hermeneutical debate outside our circles has grown so prolific and vigorous that at times it threatens to be the only issue for some. Yet the discussion may be "not less serious than that of the Reformation"¹ itself. Indeed, we believe something comparable to a Hermeneutical Reformation is needed in our day.

As one of the contributions that has arisen outside evangelical circles, the New Hermeneutic of some existentialist theologians focused on the problem of transcending the historical particularity and the antique address of Scripture by stressing the words "now," "today" and the need to recapitulate Scripture's stories in the believer's present existence.² Meanwhile two other offerings arose as a partial rebuke to the sterility³ of a liberal Historical Critical approach: New Criticism⁴ and Canon Criticism.⁵ In both the focus of attention

¹The phrase is from Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. vii.

²Especially in Kornelis Miskotte, *Zur biblischen Hermeneutik* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1959), pp. 42-46, as reviewed by Peter Rhea Jones, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Rev. Exp.* 72 (1975), pp. 139-142; J. M. Robinson, "Hermeneutic Since Barth," *New Frontiers in Theology*, eds. J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb, (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 1-77.

³See E. F. Scott, "The Limitations of the Historical Method," *Studies in Early Christianity*, ed. Shirley Jackson Case, (New York: The Century Co., 1928), p. 5; O. C. Edwards, Jr., "Historical-Critical Method's Failure of Nerve and a Prescription For a Tonic: A Review of Some Recent Literature," *ATR* 59 (1977), pp. 116f; W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Current Crisis in Exegesis and the Apostolic Use of Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:8-10," *JETS* 21 (1978), esp. pp. 3-11.

⁴Major exponents of the school of New Criticism are R. S. Crane, Northrup Frye, I. A. Richards, Oscar Walzel, W. K. Wimsatt. For a definition and criticism see, E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University Press, 1976), pp. 124-130.

⁵Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 97-114; Gerald T. Sheppard, "Canon Criticism: The proposal of Brevard Childs and an Assessment for Evangelical Hermeneutics," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 6 (1976), pp. 3-17.

was the text instead of merely completing one's work with an examination of the alleged literary sources and the reigning historical situation. As a redress to the previous imbalances and the sterility of historical-critical exegesis, these solutions would have the interpreter now concentrate on repeated phrases, patterns, larger sense units, and the canon as a whole rather than an atomized approach to individual words, tenses or the literary sources used. The literature and varieties of positions thus grew bulkier by the day as more and more solutions were set forth.⁶

But what of evangelicals? The time was long past for our entry into this field once again. Already we were faced with problems arising from an accelerated culture not to mention our own needs and the challenges of numerous novel hermeneutical systems. Where was one to begin?

In our judgment, it has to be first a return to the basics and then a frontal assault on the most difficult questions of interpretation faced today.

GENERAL HERMENEUTICS

No definition of interpretation could be more fundamental than this: to interpret we must in every case give the sense the Scriptural writer himself gave to his own words. The first step in the interpretive process is to link only those ideas with the author's language that he connected with them. The second step is to express these results in language which can be understood by others.

But at no point has modern society, including evangelicals, resisted hermeneutical rules more strenuously than at the point of this definition. In our post-Kantian relativism, most interpreters have concluded, as E. D. Hirsch⁷ correctly analyzed it, that "all 'knowledge' is relative"⁸ and a return back to the author's own meanings is both unnecessary and wrong. Instead, meaning for most has become a personal, subjective, and changing thing. It is "what speaks to me," "what turns me on," "what I get out of a text;" not what an author had intended by his use of his words.

But in our view, such "cognitive atheists"⁹ subvert the goal of objective knowledge and threaten the very possibility of learning since all is reduced to the horizon of one's own prejudices and personal predilections. This is true whether it is done for "spiritual" or philosophical reasons: both usurp the author's revelatory stance and insert our own authority for his. The only way our generation will be delivered from such a horrible interpretive solipsism will be to adopt the earlier distinction of E. D. Hirsch between meaning and significance:

⁶A fairly recent review article is Rober Lapointe, "Hermeneutics Today," *BTB* 2 (1972), pp. 107-154.

⁷E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); idem, *Aims*.

⁸Hirsch, *Aims*, p. 4.

⁹Ibid., pp. 4, 36, 49.

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance* on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception or a situation.¹⁰

Only by maintaining these definitions and distinctions will Scripture be delivered from the hands of its enemies and its friends. All our own notions of truth and principle must be set aside in favor of those the sacred writers taught if we are to be valid interpreters of them. In fact, the basic teaching of all of sacred theology is inseparably connected with the results of our hermeneutics; for what is that theology except that which Scriptures have taught? And the way to ascertain what the Scriptures have taught is to apply the rules and principles of interpretation. Therefore it is imperative that these rules be properly grounded and that their application be skillfully and faithfully applied. For if the foundation be the product of conjecture, imagination, or error what more can be hoped for in the results?

The Bible is to be Interpreted by the Same Rules as Other Books

Now it may be laid down as a first rule that the Bible is to be interpreted in the same manner and with the same principles as all other books. Of course we mean by this the manner they were interpreted before the literary revolution that came in 1946, which autocratically announced the freedom and autonomy of a work from its author and which reversal E. D. Hirsch sought to rectify in his *Validity in Interpretation*.

But some will object that the Bible is not a common or profane book: it deals with supernatural things; therefore it ought to be treated separately from other books. While it is a fact that it is a revelation containing supernatural things which no human may aspire to know as a man, yet the inference drawn from this agreed fact is not necessary. After all, it is a *revelation* to us which God deliberately designed to communicate to human beings what they themselves could not or would not know unless they had received such from God. To deny this is to be reduced to saying that God gave a revelation in which nothing is revealed or that the disclosure of God was also a concealment! But that just reverses the meaning of words and the reality itself.

More recently, another objection has been voiced.¹¹ To insist that Scripture is to be read like any other book cuts at the heart of understanding Scripture's unique status and how it continues to function as a norm in a religious community. The rules must be loose enough to allow altogether new "meanings" to be attached to those ancient words if they are to function for peoples removed from the original audience by several thousand years. But surely, this is to confuse the very distinction Hirsch made between *meaning* and *significance*. Past particularity may not be transcended by substituting

¹⁰Hirsch, *Validity*, p. 8. Unfortunately, even Hirsch undermined his own judgments in his later work, *Aims*. See our critique and references in "the Current Crisis," pp. 3, 4, and nn. 6-7.

¹¹Sheppard, "Canon Criticism," p. 17.

present significance as the new meaning of the text, for then the chasm between the "then" and "now" of the text is jumped too facilely and at a terrific cost. One is called upon to sacrifice objectivity and all divine authority. The price is too high.

The point then, remains. God has deliberately decided to accommodate us men by disclosing himself in our language and according to that mode we are accustomed to in other literary productions. While the content is vastly different, the medium of language is identical.

The Principles of Interpretation are as Native and Universal to Men as is Speech Itself¹²

The source of man's ability to interpret is not to be derived from some new science, technical skill or exotic course open only to the more gifted intellects of a society. The general rules of interpreting are not learned, invented, or discovered by men; rather, they are part and parcel of his nature as a being made in the image of God. Given the gift of communication and speech itself, man already began to practice the principles of hermeneutics. Thus this art has been in use from the moment that God spoke to Adam in the Garden or from the time when Adam addressed Eve until the present. In human conversation, the person spoken to is always the interpreter: the speaker is ever the author. And correct understanding is ever a return back to those meanings which the speaker himself attached to his own words.

It is agreed that there is more than a native art in interpretation; there is the science of hermeneutics, which may collect these observed rules as already practiced by native speakers and arrange them in an orderly way for the purpose of study and reflection. But such a science cannot preempt the fact that the rules were in operation before they were codified and examined. The situation here is exactly what it is with grammar books and dictionaries; they too cannot prescribe what a language must do, they only describe what happens when its best speakers have used it. So it is with hermeneutics.

But all this sounds too facile to match the experience of many who have wrestled with the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic of the original text of Scripture. How could the art of interpretation be of such a common sense variety when the subject seems to be so dependent on such great learning and dedicated study as to be able to place the interpreter back into the government, climate, society, and religious conditions of those biblical times? How can we accurately hear the apostles and prophets without possessing a good measure of control over Greek and Hebrew? Is not the object of all this study to place the interpreter as closely as possible to the times and thought of the sacred writers? Surely these facts contradict our second rule as stated above.

On the contrary, they merely confound one type of learning, which is only preparatory, and an antecedent study for the task of hermeneutics which still

¹²Let the reader observe that I am indebted for many of my ideas in these rules to Moses Stuart, "Remarks on Hahn's Definition of Interpretation and Some Topics Connected With It," *The Biblical Repository* 1 (1831), pp. 139-159; idem, "Are the Same Principles of Interpretation to be Applied to the Scriptures as to Other Books?" *The Biblical Repository* 2 (1832), pp. 124-137.

must follow. Never can any or all of this learning and study be substituted for interpretation or by itself constitute the principles of hermeneutics. If birth and providence had favored us that we should have been present and part of that culture and language when one or another of these prophets or apostles had been speaking, we could have dispensed with all this background and language study at once. For then we would have understood them as immediately as we understand speakers in our own day, without the aid of encyclopedias, grammars, dictionaries, and geographies. It is only the passing of time which has rendered this additional step necessary for those who must declare, not only what is transparently clear on the surface with regard to our salvation (the perspicuity of Scripture), but also teach the full counsel of God.

True, men have occasionally laid down rules in the science of general hermeneutics which were a departure from the principles known to us by virtue of the image of God and the gift of communication; but fortunately their observance has been short-lived and more reliable men are raised up who call for a return to those rules that do not violate what *nature* has taught, *art* has practiced, and *science* has digested and arranged in systems.

Therefore, we conclude that there is a good deal of learning that is sometimes necessary if we are to come to a knowledge of words which we do not ordinarily know from a daily hearing and speaking of them. We must study those words until they become as much a part of us as are our own vocabulary and times. But the principles for interpreting these foreign Greek and Hebrew words is not different from interpreting those of our own conversations.

Of course, it would be wrong to argue that everyone is automatically and totally successful in the *practice* of this hermeneutical art just because it is part and parcel of his gift of communication. Surely, there are some conversations and books which are difficult for some, where the words and general subject are not part of their person as yet. This is again where learning is necessary. Yet the basic rules will remain the same whether the target language is Paul's Greek, Isaiah's Hebrew, Virgil's Latin, or Einstein's Physics.

My Personal Reception and Application of an Author's Words is a Distinct and Secondary Act From the Need First to Understand His Words

The "significance" of a literary work names a *relationship* between that meaning intended by the author's use of a certain sequence of words and some person, idea, or situation--as Hirsch has so aptly contested in the definition already given. Therefore it would be wrong to confuse, or reverse the two processes.

But some will contend that it is God who speaks in the Bible and not men; the men were the mere receptacles of what God wanted to say through them. Revelation, on this view, concealed from the authors perhaps as much as it uncovered. Therefore the normal rules do not apply.

The answer to this charge is easy. What God spoke, he spoke in human language and not in a heavenly tongue! Moreover, he spoke through the

vocabulary, idiom, circumstances, and personalities of each of the chosen writers. Just try translating each of the writers of Scripture and this difference will be immediately apparent. You will wear out a lexicon looking up new Hebrew words in Job and Hosea, but you will read with delightful speed and ease Genesis or Haggai. The Greek grammar of the book of Hebrews slows down most of the best to a snail's pace but John's gospel poses few if any grammatical roadblocks. No, the superiority of the Scriptures over other books does not come in the *manner* we interpret it, but in its *matter* and grand source.

Still, it will be argued that "the natural man receiveth not the things of God, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Surely, it is argued, that calls for a different set of rules if we are to interpret the Bible. Therefore, a man must be enlightened in a spiritual way before he can understand the Scriptures.

However, the case is over-stated. It is not as if there were two logics and two hermeneutics in the world: one nature, the other spiritual. Paul's point has to do with personal application and significance of that understood and prior meaning of his words. And it is also true, of course, that a person must be in a sympathetic state and a proper condition, to begin to understand subjects in which he is not naturally inclined--whether those subjects be astro-physics, mathematics, poetry or the Bible. Consequently, Paul's word cannot be used to claim that natural men do not understand any part of the Bible until they become spiritual men; such would plainly contradict our experience and the appeal of Scripture to men who are called by that same Bible and who will be judged for rejecting that which Scripture thinks should have been abundantly clear to them, even though they were not spiritual thinkers. I remember one professor I had at the University who gave one of the best explanations of Romans 1-6 I have ever heard, but when he was asked by a skeptical student if he "believed that stuff," he scoffed and mockingly replied: "Who said anything about personally believing it? I just said that's what Paul said and you better remember that's what he said!" He understood Romans well enough to teach it, but he "didn't buy it," i.e., "he received it not" because he refused to see any relationship between the text and himself. We believe that is the special work of the Holy Spirit to convict men so that they see that relationship. But it does not contradict the fact that God meant for his revelation to be understood.

One more attempt is made to break this third rule of general hermeneutics which suggests that the prophets confessed that they themselves did not understand the words they wrote. Why then should we attempt to return to the human author's meanings when they confessed their own ignorance in a text like 1 Peter 1:10-12?

I have already examined this problem and the text of 1 Peter 1:10-12 in two other works,¹³ but again we strongly affirm that the prophets claim ignorance

¹³Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of Evangelicalism: Promise Theology," *JETS* 13 (1970), pp. 94-96: *idem* "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith*, ed. Kenneth Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc. Publishers, 1978), pp. 125-126.

only on the matter of *time*. Yet they most decisively affirm that they knew five rather precise components of our salvation. They knew they were writing about: (1) the Messiah, (2) his sufferings, (3) his glorified state yet to come, (4) the sequence of his suffering to his glory was in that order: first suffering and then glory, and (5) that the salvation they announced in those pre-Christian days had application not only to themselves, but also "to us" in the Christian era! Scholars err badly when they translate the Greek phrase *eis tina ē poion kairon* ("what [time] or what manner of time") as if it meant "what [person]!" The RSV, NASB, the Berkeley, Amplified, and NEB footnote are definitely incorrect here. It is a grammatical impossibility! Instead the passage teaches these men were most aware of what they were writing.

The same arguments can be raised against the attempt to use Daniel 12:6-8 to prove that Daniel had no idea what he was predicting there,¹⁴ or to use Caiaphas' prediction that "one man must die for the nation" in John 11:49-52¹⁵ to prove that men can make unconscious predictions, and Peter's claim that "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private loosing" in 2 Peter 1:10-21.¹⁶

Still some will remember the promise of our Lord that the Holy Spirit will "teach *you* all things" (John 14:26), "take what is his and declare it to *you*" (John 16:15), and "will guide *you* into all truth" (John 16:13).¹⁷ However these verses were spoken only to our Lord's disciples and they specifically constitute the promise of the New Testament canon. Should believers complain that this too severely restricts the "you" of the texts so that other texts like the great commission would also be thereby jeopardized, I will reply, as did William Carey to his generation (who preferred to leave the work of discipling all nations to the first disciples of Jesus) by saying that the divine intention in this verse was to make it a universal "you" for the text continues, "And lo, I am with *you* always even to the end of the age." Thus where the extension is made, we must make it also. But where it is directed to others (as was John 14:25-26; 15:2-27; 16:12-15) we must not expropriate it and arrogantly declare that by a new miracle of the Spirit's special revelation of the meaning of biblical passages, we are spared all the difficult work of exegesis and interpretation!

ALLEGED EXCEPTIONS TO GENERAL HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

There are about five principal bypasses that have been used by various interpreters of Scripture to escape the three basic rules and the key distinction of the difference between "meaning" and "significance" already set forth in this chapter. They are: (1) allegorical interpretation, (2) an overdependence on the principle of the "perspicuity of Scripture," (3) an improper use of the principle of "progressive revelation," (4) the unfair appropriation of the alleged freedom with which the New Testament writers cite the Old Testament

¹⁴Kaiser, "Single Intent," pp. 126-128.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 128-131.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 131-133.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 133-134.

text, and (5) the appeal to the implied presence of a dual sense of the Messianic predictions of the Old Testament. Each of these claims must be examined, especially with a view to determining if divine revelation did indeed leave some "hints" that will open up the restriction of interpretation to the single intention of the author. Unfortunately many hope that such procedures will protect their Bibles from errors and allow them to claim the doctrine of inerrancy with good conscience when others are left only with what they call the mere letter "of the text."¹⁸

Allegorical Interpretation

This method of explaining Scripture adopts as its ruling idea that certain words have another meaning beside their natural meaning. Those who adopt this view either say: (1) that many passages of Scripture have in addition to the literal (grammatical-historical) sense a hidden (deeper, higher, spiritual) sense, or (2) that Scripture has no other sense besides the simple literal meaning, but there is another deeper sense *under* the literal one, a *hypomoia*. Both views amount to the same results except that the second is a little more sophisticated in its approach.

The source for this pattern of thinking about Scripture was not originally traced to Scripture. It is built mostly on a so-called doctrine of correspondences, in which there was said to be a correspondence between the earthly or natural world with that of the heavenly or spiritual realm so as to make the former supply correct and perfect analogies of the latter. Of course this concept is most clearly located in the Platonic thought, where the visible world is only a shadow of those invisible and higher images among the ancient Greeks. This method was adopted out of expediency and desperation tactics to conceal, excuse, and thus venerate those mythological tales about the exploits of their gods and men which otherwise were no longer tolerable on a literal hermeneutic. Likewise some Jewish philosophers, theosophists, and Pharisees found the method useful for deriving their own opinions and patterns of thinking from texts which otherwise would have resisted the boldest of hermeneutical assaults. No less vulnerable is much of present day evangelical preaching and teaching, which is usually borne out of a failure to spend enough time with the text and patiently to hear what it is saying first rather than out of any overt embarrassment about the literal claims of an alleged defunct Scripture. Nevertheless, this method does open up an easy path, particularly for those quick, adroit, fanciful, and lazy minds which under the guise of truth and righteousness teach what they will from where they will in Scripture. Fortunately for the church, little real immediate harm is done in most cases (other than teaching poor methodology and starving God's people from the full counsel of God) since most evangelical practitioners of this method merely

¹⁸That brings us the infamous interpretation of the dichotomy between the "letter" and the "spirit" of Scripture attributed to 2 Corinthians 3:6; Romans 2:29; 7:6. However, we reject this interpretation as failing to understand at all what Paul meant in these passages. See *ibid.*, pp. 134-136 and W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Weightier and Lighter Matters of the Law," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 187-188.

"gather wool" from other passages where this teaching could have been found (had they not been too lazy to have gone to those correct texts for the lesson they wanted to teach in the first place) and then they import it into unnatural biblical contexts.

However, there is a serious wing of conservative interpreters who claim that the dual meaning of Scripture can in principle be argued from the fact that there is a dual set of authors for every text: *viz*, God and the writer. Still others allege that Scripture itself recommends this method by giving us two examples of "mild allegory"¹⁹ in Galatians 4:19-26²⁰ and 1 Corinthians 9:8-10.

The first argument about dual authorship we have already dealt with in the first part of this chapter and we have examined at length 1 Corinthians 9:8-10 elsewhere.²¹ But Galatians 4:22-26 does appear at first blush to concede the case. But two rejoinders may be made here: (1) in Galatians 4:20, Paul confesses that he is somewhat hesitant as to just how he should address the Galatians but he will now explain his point to them in their own way (*allaxai t̄an phōnān mou*),²² using the Genesis story of Sarah and Hagar as an illustration to suit more their rabbinical tastes, for as Ellicott observed, (2) Galatians 4:24 warned that Paul merely borrowed the Old Testament for his illustration;

¹⁹Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 126. In fairness to my good friend, I should say, however, that he explicitly wants to limit such allegorical privileges to the apostles due to their "revelatory stance." Whether he can convince others to do so though is another problem.

²⁰For a good discussion of this text see Robert J. Kepple, "An Analysis of Antiochene Exegesis of Galatians 4: 24-26," *WTJ* 39 (1977), pp. 239-249.

²¹Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Current Crisis," pp. 11-18.

²²This phrase is generally translated "and to change my voice tone." Yet Augustus Hahn, "On the Grammatico-Historical Interpretation of the Scriptures," *The Biblical Repository* 1 (1831), p. 133, argued that the change was from argument to accommodating the Galatians in their own allegories so they could see Paul's preceding point. This suggestion should not be dismissed, as is almost universally done by commentators. "My little children," urges Paul, "I could wish indeed that I were present now with you, but to change my tone, (let me put it to you this way) . . . all these classes of things can be allegorized (as follows)." In other words, his tone may well indicate both his substance as well as his manner. Hahn's full quote is: "*Gladly were I now with you, my children, and would speak with each of you in particular, according to his special wants, consequently, with each one differently*, in order to convince each of you after his own opinions and prejudices, that his union of Judaism with Christianity is to be rejected . . . For I am hesitating in respect to you; i.e. doubtful how I shall rightly address you. But ye now, who would gladly retain the yoke of Judaism, (and how the Judaizing teachers and their Rabbins allegorized is well known,) tell me, do you understand the law? I will explain it then to you--*allaxas t̄an phōnān*--in your own way; in order thus to convince you . . ."

he was not exegeting it; for he clearly said, "*all which class of things*" (*hatina*) viewed in the most general way "may be put into an allegory" (*estin allagoroumena*).²³ Thus Paul supplies no comfort in this text nor in 1 Corinthians 9:8-10 for an allegorical practice.

Surprisingly enough, what some interpreters label as the spiritual, deeper, or higher sense is often nothing more than the real and proper sense which the writer intended when he wrote it; e.g. when 1 Corinthians 10:1ff. teaches that it was Christ who led the Israelites in the desert and gave them food and water, Paul only repeats the actual fact that it was the angel of the face of God in whom God had placed his name (Exod. 23:20-21, cf. 17:6) who was there. In fact the theophoric name "Rock" of 1 Corinthians 10 was likewise Mosaic (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18; 17:10; 26:4). Our problem often is that we do not know the Old Testament well enough to hear its proper message.

Then too the problem is that the word *literal* is automatically linked too frequently with those features of the text that deal solely with the physical and the material: this is not true. No meaning of a text is complete until the interpreter has heard the *total single* intention of the author who stood in the presence of God. Thus the command, "thou shalt not murder" forbids not just the overt act itself, but every internal disturbance of the inner emotional make-up of a person which may lead to murder as well. It likewise encourages every positive act whereby one seeks to promote and to enhance the life of one's fellow beings. This is not a double or triple sense to a single literal meaning, but is the full sense included in that single idea, which can be demonstrated from the antecedent revelation of God against which background this new word was given, while the portion of the "Bible" available to the writers at that point in time acted as an informing theology, as well as from the subsequent examples given in the "Covenant Code" of Exodus 21-23. Therefore we conclude that the so-called "literal" interpretation must include the same *depth* of meaning as the writer himself included. This is controlled by the words he selected, the range of meaning he gives to those words as judged by his usage, the total context of his thought, and the preceding theology already in existence when he writes and to which he explicitly refers or clearly alludes to by his use of phrases, concepts or terms that already have become household biblical concepts or technical uses in that literature.

There is another species of this allegorical argument which viewed the Old Testament as containing the New Testament within it under a *veil*. But this will be treated under New Testament quotations of the Old Testament and Messianic predictions. For the present, we conclude that allegorical interpretation cannot be established in principle as a method of treating Scripture. While Scripture does include the figure of speech of allegory within its pages (e.g. Prov. 5:15-19), this is clearly marked by the writer's intention and not the interpreter's wish, however sincere or disparate. Only in those instances may the interpreter employ the rules for interpreting allegory.

²³ Not only Ellicott, but also John Eadie, *Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1884), p. 359, make the point that this text does not say "which things have been allegorized" already, but that the whole class of these things in Genesis may be grouped and allegorized now (present participle) for the present purposes.

The Principle of the Perspicuity of Scripture

The doctrine of the perspicuity announces that the Bible is sufficiently clear so that believers may understand it. As J. Stafford Wright stated it, this implies three things: (1) "Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person to live by it," (2) "Scripture is deep enough to form an inexhaustible mine for readers of the highest intellectual capacity," and (3) the perspicacity of the Scriptures resides in the fact that God "intend[ed] all Scripture to be revelation of Himself to man."²⁴ Thus, just as the natural order is sufficiently simple for the ordinary person to live in it without being aware of all that the physical and natural scientist knows, so the spiritual order is sufficiently clear as well. The comparison is more than accidental.

But this principle may be overextended if it is used as an excuse against any further investigation or strenuous study on the part of believers who were not contemporaries with those prophets and apostles who first spoke the Word of God. While Scripture, in any faithful translation, may be sufficiently perspicuous (i.e., clear) to bring us to face the sinfulness of our person, the basic facts of the gospel, an awareness of what we must do if we are to be part of the family of God, and how we may go about living a new lifestyle in Christ, that is not to say that we have exhausted its total mind. Neither does it imply that the solution to every difficult question in Scripture or life may have a simple if not simplistic answer. It only affirms that when difficulties are encountered in Scripture, there is more than enough which is plainly taught to keep all believers well nourished if they will. This truth is much like the story that is attributed to Dwight L. Moody. When he was accosted by a woman who asked in a complaining tone, "Mr. Moody, what shall I do about the hard things I can't understand in the Bible," he replied, "Madam, have you ever eaten chicken?" Somewhat upset by this *non sequitur* she volunteered, "Yes. . . ." "What did you do with the bones?" interrupted Moody. "I put them on the side of my plate," she responded. "Then put the difficult verses there also," advised Moody, "for there's more than enough food to digest in the rest of what you can understand." This is the doctrine of perspicuity.

Yet two other problems must be raised here: (1) How can this doctrine be squared with the wide divergence of Scriptural interpretation in Christendom, especially among equally committed believers? and (2) Why should so much emphasis be placed on advanced training for teachers, preachers, and future interpreters for the body of Christ's Church when 1 John 2:20 says that we have an unction from the Holy Spirit so that we know all things? In both of these instances if perspicuity is pressed beyond what is intended in its definition, it becomes a magic wand giving the interpreter not just sufficient and adequate answers for salvation and living, but a kind of total knowledge of Scripture.

To answer these probes, we must point out first that the amount of agreement in Christendom is really large and impressive--and it exists precisely in

²⁴J. Stafford Wright, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *Theological Students Fellowship Letter* (Summer, 1959), p. 6.

those areas and those church councils where a patient listening to large blocks of biblical texts were uppermost on the agenda. However, when believers began to substitute tradition or types of pattern thinking as a prior commitment to a hearing of the Word of God, then the Word of God became bound and was forced to serve our systems, our traditions, and our hermeneutics. In yet more subtle areas of difference between believers, perhaps it is a matter of being too selective in our approach to Scripture (e.g. we tend to claim God has raised us up in these days to emphasize this "neglected truth"--which he probably did--but the truth did not remain neglected after your success under God). Or it may be a need for more candor which separates prescriptive and normative doctrine from those which we ought to call descriptive and preferred by us for personal and historical reasons, thereby clearing the reputation of Scripture.

But it is the second objection which is more serious. 1 John 2:20 was not meant to rule out any teaching or need for explaining some texts; for if it did, then John's own letter, which sought to instruct those same Christians, would be in violation of his own principle. The anointing of the Holy Spirit in 1 John is similar to the spiritual man's reception of the Word in 1 Corinthians 2. The believer ideally should not need to be urged by teachers to make a personal application, nor be urged to see the significance of that Word of God once understood, but should this process ever be confused with interpretation? Furthermore, is it not true, that the further away the reader gets from the original languages and times in which the biblical authors wrote, the greater will be the need for aids, teachers, and assistance?

As with the Reformers, we too need to recall their system of checks and balances as they too grappled with the same problem we have faced here. They argued for the priesthood of believers (for it was taught in Scripture and it embodied the truth of the perspicuity of the Scriptures), but they also insisted that the final court of appeal was to the original languages in which Scripture was written (for it was the apostles and prophets, not we, who had stood in the counsel of God and received God's precise Word). So our generation must reflect the same balance or we will suffer for our recklessness.

The Principle of Progressive Revelation

One of the chief areas of concern for interpreters of Scripture is the area of the progressiveness of revelation, especially as it bears on moral difficulties of some texts. Unfortunately, despite the popularity of the term, not all are agreed on what exactly is meant by progressive revelation.

C. H. Dodd devoted a key chapter in his book *The Authority of the Bible*²⁵ to show that Jesus Christ was "the climax to a whole complex process which we have traced in the Bible." . . . and since it was "of the highest spiritual worth" therefore ". . . we must recognize it in the fullest sense as a

²⁵C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (London: Fontana, 1960). It was published originally in 1928, revised in 1938, 1960. In those days it was "a current phrase," *ibid*, p. 248. See Chapter 13 for his whole discussion, pp. 248-263.

revelation of God."²⁶ For liberal Protestants, the phrase was important for three reasons: (1) from a critical standpoint, it downgraded those elements scholars were skeptical about and labeled them as late or unauthentic while it elevated the "highest" points of Scripture, which thereby gave liberal scholars a standard by which to correct and negate the baser elements of Scripture; (2) from an apologetic standpoint it gave a rationale by which one could excuse and justify the more "primitive" morality of the Bible by means of that later revelation which allegedly saw through those previous "primitive" excesses; and (3) from a theological standpoint, progressive revelation often became a slogan for an arbitrary and inconsistent process of selecting those favored few instances in the total history of biblical revelation from which the doctrine of the Bible could legitimately be drawn.²⁷

Yet when all is said and done, the implied and explicit criticisms in the liberal use of the phrase do not answer our problem. Certainly everyone agrees that a revelation which has been mediated through history must necessarily have been progressive. But this then raises the key question: how much accommodation of that message has been present? Even if we are convinced, as we should be, that the revelation of God was from the very inception of the Old Testament of the loftiest type, a serious difficulty still remains. What about those provisions which appear to involve God himself in the very foolishness which later revelation will decry? Thus Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac; Deborah, a prophetess, pronounces Jael blessed when she literally nailed Sisera down; Moses' word includes provisions for slavery, and divorce; Joshua is commanded totally to wipe out all Canaanites; and David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, invokes curses on his enemies and prays for their destruction.²⁸ The problems are well known. The answers are not!

It is not enough nor is it an adequate response to note that a good deal of the morality described in that earlier age did fall under the judgment of God. It is a fact that Jesus did not regard the Mosaic law on divorce as normative, but declared it was given because of the hardness of men's hearts. And it is also true that while polygamy and unchastity are plainly described, they are only that--descriptions of the sins of mankind.

Neither is it proper to take the critical solution with its outright denial of the revelation of God and transfer these so-called mistaken notions to

²⁶Ibid., p. 263.

²⁷This analysis is dependent on James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 144-146. I am also indebted to almost the same analysis in James Packer, "An Evangelical View of Progressive Revelation," in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith*, ed. Kenneth Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers, 1978), pp. 143-158, especially pp. 146-148.

²⁸The list is a modification of James Orr's list in his chapter "The Progressiveness of Revelation: Moral Difficulties," *The Problem of the Old Testament* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1909), p. 466. Also see H. S. Curr, "Progressive Revelation," *Journal of the Transactions of the Victorian Institute* 83 (1951), pp. 1-23, especially p. 7.

the writers and the light they possessed as a result of their own speculations on the matter. Nor can we adopt an allegorization of all these passages and attempt to overlook their plain claims. There are enough problems without adding to them.

A whole treatise on the ethics of the Old Testament is necessary adequately to deal with the issues opened up here (and this we will do elsewhere, D. v.), but for now let it be observed that the best response still is the 1929 set of Princeton lectures on ethics given by William Brenton Greene, Jr.²⁹

Nevertheless, we will deal with the issues presented by the progress of revelation insofar as they bear on the subject of Scriptural interpretation. The following observations appear in order:

1. Whenever the charge is leveled that *God* is depicted in the Old Testament as being vengeful, hateful, partial to a few favorites or even vindictive, let the interpreter beware. He must strive all the more to understand both the words used and the concepts appealed to by the writer. For example, the common depiction of Yahweh as a vengeful and wrathful God is relieved by a fair understanding of the meaning and use of Hebrew *nāqam*. When George Mendenhall studied this term, he concluded that ". . . if we analyze the actual word uses that have supported the ideas of blood vengeance held by many modern scholars, the results are simply incompatible both with the ideas of primitive tribal organization and the concept of God that have long been considered to be self-evident."³⁰ God's vengeance is no more than the exercise of responsible sovereignty, according to Mendenhall's studies. So it is with the wrath and hate of God. Abraham Heschel devoted a large segment of his work on *The Prophets* to the problem of Divine wrath and concluded that it is a problem for us because of the associations we have with the words anger or wrath and not because of those made by the writer.³¹
2. The interpreter must distinguish between what the Bible teaches and approves from that which it merely reports and records. The lies of Shiphrah, Puah, and Rahab are just that: lies; nevertheless the women are approved on other grounds: for heroic acts of faith. Let the reader then beware that approval in *one* act is not an automatic endorsement of the biblical individual in *all* that they may do. Abraham and David are guilty of great lapses of faith, yet they are nonetheless used by God.

²⁹William Brenton Greene, Jr., "The Ethics of the OT," *PTR* 27 (1929), pp. 153-192; 313-366. Most of this essay may now be conveniently located in *Classical Evangelical Essays in OT Interpretation*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 207-235.

³⁰George E. Mendenhall, "The 'Vengeance' of Yahweh," *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 69-104.

³¹Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 279-306.

3. The Scriptures' own assessment of things must be preferred to our off-hand impressions of situations. Thievery is not approved in the Israelites' massive "borrowing" from the Egyptians, for the word *šā'al* meant they just "asked" for jewels and precious ornaments from the Egyptians and God gave them favor in their eyes. Likewise believers must not try to plead the case for the condemned Canaanites and Amalekites without first understanding how long the righteous patience of God endured their sinful outrages in their eponymous hero's own sexual perversions (Gen. 9:22ff.) and the barbaric form of attack on the sick, elderly, and defenseless (Deut. 24:17-19; Exod. 17:8-16). Here again the solution is not in an evolutionary arrangement of revelation or morality but in letting the text speak its own mind fully.
4. The prayers of imprecation in the Old Testament (and New Testament!--2 Tim. 4:14; Gal. 5:12; Rev. 6:10) must be understood as couched in an inbred hatred for sin and wickedness wherever it occurs, along with an earnest wish that all attacks on the kingdom of God receive such a public and stinging rebuke that they will not impede the progress of God's imminent triumph over all evil. For once again, hardly a single curse in one of these 65 verses of imprecation in the whole Psalter cannot be found elsewhere in the Bible as a declarative sentence or a simple statement of fact as to what the fate of the cause and persons of wickedness shall be!³²

We conclude that progressive revelation does not open the door for inferior revelations as a prelude to more satisfactory and less embarrassing later revelations. In this case the concept of progress and accommodation have taken on philosophic values imported from our culture. As James Orr concluded (on a better note than parts of his essay):

. . . revelation can be held responsible only for *the new element which it introduces* . . . Revelation . . . implants a truth, constitutes a relation, establishes a principle, which may have a whole rich content implicit in it, but it cannot convey to the recipient from the first a full, all-around apprehension of everything that principle involves.³³

Surely in every case, the total subject to which a revelation belongs is greater by far than any single revelation contributed to that subject area!

³²See the exceptionally fine article by Chalmers Martin, "Imprecations in the Psalms," *PTR* 1 (1903), pp. 537-553--now available in *Classical Evangelical Essays* . . . , pp. 113-132. Also see the best article on the most offensive of all Psalms (137): Howard Osgood, "Dashing the Little Ones Against the Rock," *PTR* 1 (1903), pp. 23-37.

³³Orr, *Problem of Old Testament*, p. 473 (*italics his*).

The Precedent of the New Testament Quotations of the Old Testament

There is a widespread school of thought today that concedes the point that the New Testament authors were often times extremely free in their appeal to the Old Testament texts. In so doing, this school generally follows the thought that the leading rabbinical practices of the day allowed *peshet*, *midrashic* or multiple senses in interpreting biblical passages. Accordingly, some modern evangelical scholars affirmed, on shaky hermeneutical grounds, that the practice found in the New Testament quotations of the Old Testament sets for us a precedent which would lead us to a "fuller sense" (the Catholic contribution of *sensus plenior*) of the Old Testament text than what the original Old Testament authors intended their words to contain. Some, knowing what a Pandora's box this opens up for hermeneutics, have tried to insist that this privilege be restricted to the New Testament writers alone since they had a "revelatory stance."³⁴ The problem, however, is that the students of this point of view do not heed this qualification and argue that what was good enough for the apostles will certainly also produce good results for them as preachers of that word. The issue must be faced.

To be fair, we must limit our discussion solely to those passages where the New Testament writers were in debate with the Jews or where they sought to borrow the authority of the Old Testament. If in these passages we claim some fuller or secondary sense as an authoritative interpretation of the text it becomes clear that our wish is parent to the thought. This hermeneutical principle must then be acknowledged to be an *a priori*, as it was in Richard Longenecker's masterful presentation of the case. He allows:

The Jewish roots of Christianity make it *a priori* likely that the exegetical procedures of the New Testament would resemble to some extent those of then [sic] contemporary Judaism. This has long been established with regard to the hermeneutics of Paul and the Talmud, and it is becoming increasingly evident with respect to the Qumran texts as well.³⁵

But then it must follow what Donald Hagner also conceded, that "... the true value of the arguments from the *sensus plenior* of the Old Testament is for those who are already in the household of faith."³⁶ And then the real

³⁴Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 218. Also see a similar, but less cautious approach of Donald A. Hagner, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," *Interpreting the Word of God*, eds. Samuel Schultz and Morris Inch (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 78-104. As an example of one who takes his cue from this principle and asserts, "The necessity of recognizing the mystical sense is quite evident from the way in which the New Testament interprets the old," see L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1952), pp. 140ff.

³⁵Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 203.

³⁶Hagner, "The Old Testament," p. 103.

problem emerges. Of what use would that be to a new struggling faith which was trying to establish its credibility, appeal, and direct continuity with the ancient predictions of the Jews. An in-house word was the last thing needed in that day. As long ago as 1885, Frederic Gardiner had announced:

In all quotations which are used argumentatively, or to establish any fact or doctrine, it is obviously necessary that the passage in question should be fairly cited according to its real intent and meaning in order that the argument drawn from it may be valid. There has been much rash criticism of some of these passages, and the assertion has been unthinkingly made that the apostles, and especially St. Paul, brought up in rabbinical schools of thought, quoted the Scriptures after a rabbinical and in consequential fashion. A patient and careful examination of the passages themselves will remove such misapprehensions.³⁷

A full examination of every passage cannot be attempted here, though we have demonstrated solutions to some of these passages elsewhere.³⁸ However, we can list some errors that should be avoided in this area. They include: (1) using the New Testament as a proving ground to identify possible predictions in earlier texts; (2) using the New Testament to set the meaning that an Old Testament text may have; (3) allowing the New Testament argumentative quotation of the Old Testament to reinterpret or to supersede the original meaning and sense of the Old Testament writer; and (4) separating the doctrinal sense that a New Testament argumentative use of the Old Testament had from the doctrinal sense of the Old Testament writer and thereby breaking the continuity in the progress of God's plan of revelation.

One of the chief confusions in this area is from the argument by analogy and on top of that an argument which uses subsequent revelation as an exegetical tool to unlock God's Word to earlier generations. While we would admit that the Analogy of Faith has its place in the summary and conclusion of the exegetical procedure, it is totally out of place methodologically when it is used as a type of "divining-rod" to unlock previous revelations. The words, clauses, and sentences must first be understood as the writer's own usage of them will indicate before the theological dimensions of comparison are added.

Of course, as far as a "fuller sense" goes, we will agree if one wishes to talk about a "fuller *significance*." Likewise, if one wishes to say the *subject* to which the Old Testament prophets made individual contributions was wider by miles than what they ever dreamed of, we will also wholeheartedly agree. But the whole revelation of God as revelation hangs in jeopardy if we, an apostle, or an angel from heaven wish to add, delete, rearrange, or reassign

³⁷Frederic Gardiner, "The NT Use of the Old," in *The Old and New Testaments in Their Mutual Relations* (New York: James Pott & Co., 1885), pp. 317-318.

³⁸W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles (e.g. Amos 9:9-15 and Acts 15:13-18): A Test Passage For Theological Systems," *JETS* 20 (1977), pp. 97-111.

the sense or meaning which the prophets already received. In this act, the friends of Scripture will imperil the Scriptures as much as her enemies. We beg the Church to take another look at this area as well.

The Alleged Dual Sense to Messianic Prophecy

Closely related to the preceding topic is the question of the predictions of the Messiah in the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the New Testament. The issue again is the same as we have seen it above. Milton S. Terry says it best when he affirms ". . . the moment we admit the principle that portions of Scripture contain an occult or double sense, we introduce an element of uncertainty in the Sacred Volume, and unsettle all scientific interpretation."³⁹

In this situation, contrary to some of the preceding ones already examined, we suspect that the problem is one of terminology, definition, and an adequate explanation that fits all the biblical data. The problem arises when terms like "double fulfillment" or "double reference" are used synonymously with "double sense" or "double meaning" and interpreters begin talking about an early versus a later meaning--then the trouble begins! Other names used for the phenomena here include "Gap Prophecy," "Foreshortening of Prophetic Perspective," "Generic Prophecy," "Corporate Solidarity," and several more. Not all of this talk is bad, but much of it is undefined and presents the possibility for misunderstanding and malpractice.

In earlier expositors the tendency was to separate between one *literal* sense in the immediate context of the prophecy and a secondary *mystical* sense in its New Testament fulfillment.⁴⁰ The response to this is what we affirmed in our comments on the New Testament argumentative use of the Old Testament. Others have included additional distinctions which need not deter us here. But all were attempting to deal with the same pieces of biblical data: Scripture did address the generation present at the original announcement of that prophecy and it also spoke of a distant fulfillment; indeed it often included several intermediate fulfillments which lined up with the climactic conclusion to that anticipated event or person. Therein lies the issue for hermeneutics.

Let us be clear about the biblical facts. When Scripture predicts a victorious "Seed" for Eve and repeats that word to each of the patriarchs and each Davidite before it is fulfilled in Christ, that is a single idea with a single meaning and single sense which likewise has multiple fulfillments. Moreover, that "Seed" is deliberately given in a collective or corporate term,

³⁹Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Easton and Mains, 1883), p. 383. He there cites Owen and Ryle as supporting his view to the effect that "If Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all." "I hold that the words of Scripture were intended to have one definite sense and that our first objective should be to discover that sense, and adhere rigidly to it."

⁴⁰e.g. Thomas Hartwell Horne, *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859) 1.643.

for the divinely authorized meaning as communicated by those Old Testament writers was that believers were to share in an identity with the coming "Seed" who would be their representative. Accordingly, Paul was neither pulling a rabbinical trick of exegesis when he insisted that the "Seed" in Genesis was singular and not plural (Gal. 3:16) nor was he giving a "fuller sense" to the text than Moses had intended in Genesis 12:3 when he added that if we belong to Christ, then we too are part of Abraham's "Seed" (Gal. 3:29). That was the scope of the word "Seed" and that also was the single intent of the Old Testament writer, even though the fulfillments were multiple and lasted over many generations. And just that single meaning with its multiple scope of enactment can be seen in other biblical terms: "firstborn," "my son" (Exod. 4:22), "Servant of the Lord" (32 times in Isaiah beginning in Isa. 42:1), "my Holy One" (e.g. Ps. 16:10), and many others.

But thus far the "law of double reference" has erred only when it slipped the idea of double *meaning* into that spot or when it implied that there were *only* two foci involved: the moment of the predicted word and the moment of its fulfillment in the New Testament. Nevertheless, we believe Christ's Church would be better served if it adopted some other term, such as Willis J. Beecher's "generic prophecy," which he defined as:

. . . one which regards an event as occurring in a series of parts, separated by intervals, and expresses itself in language that may apply indifferently to the nearest part, or to the remoter parts, or to the whole--in other words, a prediction which, in applying to the whole of a complex event also applies to . . . its parts.⁴¹

Beecher sounded an important note when he stressed that henceforth interpreters should note the historical *means* God uses to fulfill his purposes (as recorded in Scripture) as well as the predictive word and the climactic fulfillment.⁴² In fact, the whole complex was a single meaning in the intention of prophet. Therefore it would be wrong to speak of a literal sense to the ancient historic word which was contemporaneous with its announcement and a deeper, mystical or double which became clear when the "prediction" (?) was fulfilled. A patient and careful examination of every Old Testament prediction that we are aware of will bear out this definition.

The *nearness* of the day of the Lord may serve as a good example of our claims here. On the lips of five prophets who spanned about four centuries (Obad. 15; Joel 1:15; 2:1; Isa. 13:6; Zeph. 1:7, 14; and Ezek. 30:3), each proclaimed the day of the Lord was "near," was "at hand," had been fulfilled at least in part (the locust plague of Joel, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 in Isaiah and Zephaniah), and was yet in that group of events yet to come when our Lord

⁴¹Willis J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 130.

⁴²*ibid.*, p. 361. Also W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "Messianic Prophecies in the Old Testament," *Dreams, Visions, and Oracles*, eds. Carl E. Amerding and Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), pp. 75-88.

returns a second time (Joel 3:14; Zech. 14:1; 2 Pet. 3:10). Thus the Day of the Lord is a generic, collective term wherein the prophet saw the near event, some of the intervening events, and the final climactic fulfillment in a single literal sense. The case is absolutely no different whether the text be James' use of Amos 9:9-11 at the Jerusalem council, Isaiah's prediction of a virgin conceiving and bearing a son in Isaiah 7:14, Matthew's appeal to Hosea 11:1: "Out of Egypt have I called 'my Son,'" or Peter's appeal to Psalm 16:8-11 on the Day of Pentecost, in which incidentally Peter affirmed under inspiration that David "foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of Christ," as well as the final triumphant enthronement of his own seed when he wrote that Psalm (Acts 2:29-31). And that should settle the argument for evangelicals!

SPECIAL HERMENEUTICS

If the key hermeneutical question is, as we have argued thus far, "What was the biblical author's meaning when he wrote a particular piece of Scriptural text?" Then we must address ourselves to another question which has also become troublesome for twentieth century believers: "What are the implications of that single meaning for those who live and read that text in a different time and culture?"

Admittedly, one of the most distinguishing features of God's revelation is its historical element. Had not Hebrews 1:1 clearly announced the same? "God, who at different times and in different manners, spoke in the past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son." But this would raise another question for contemporary men and women: "To what extent was the relevance of the Bible limited or even conditioned by the history, culture, customs, and the current mode of expression for the era in which the text was written?" In fact, "Would there not be an equation of reversal proportionality here: the more suited the text was for the original listeners and readers the less apparent and relevant would it be for subsequent readers like ourselves?"

Non-evangelicals in particular have repeatedly argued that the ancient culture of the writers of Scripture so "conditioned" and so "bound" the Word of God that it often reflected no more than those antique views of life, history, culture, customs, and world-view which was then current among the audiences of that day. But most of this modern attitude can be attributed to the denial of revelation and supernaturalism or even to a personal dislike for many of the concepts of Scripture. Accordingly ~~Rudolph~~ Bultmann's program for "de-mythologizing" the Bible is more accurately a program for dividing Scripture into a new dualism of this world and an upper world--with the upper world point of view being firmly rejected. This can be no solution for us. It is solving the issue by defining and imposing our own philosophical grid over Scripture. The real hermeneutical work must still be done. The author's abiding and trans-cultural message must be identified along with his so-called dated pieces of contemporary information. Indeed, this biblical word did come to specific people in a specific setting during a specific time with a specific idiom of communication. Why then should the very fact which was so helpful to the people in their first reception of this message now be

used as an argument against its trustworthiness by later generations--a generation which flaunts its boast about having superior knowledge over the ancient mentality?!

What then are these areas of tension that have been generated by the past particularity of the text? They are: (1) divine commands which are directed to special persons or isolated situations, (2) practices or customs which may merely reflect the cultural norm of the day, but which nevertheless cause consternation for subsequent readers who are puzzled over the problem as to whether these descriptions are still normative, and (3) the use of language when it deals with factual matters outside the spiritual realm, including allusions to biology, geography, and cosmology. The most famous section of all is Genesis 1-11. Will a consistent, legitimate hermeneutic also unlock these puzzles? Will it sustain the view of inerrancy that affirms that the *extent* of the divine activity in revelation and inspiration included both the writer's ability 1) to *adequately select* and 2) to *accurately use* words in such a way that they would reflect in every instance God's estimate, evaluation, interpretation, and point of view for mortal beings? That position will receive its most strenuous examination in the areas now before us.

Direct Divine Commands to Specific Individuals in Specific Situations

Frequently the Scriptures will address individuals with such commands as, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the ground you are standing on is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5), "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4), "Untie the ass and the colt and bring them to me" (Matt. 21:2-3), or "Carry no purse, no bag, no shoes, and greet no one on the way" (Luke 10:4). These are, no doubt, things which in their natural and direct form are commands which are directed to no else other than to those whom they were commanded. It must be readily acknowledged that our Lord addressed a significant number of commands and promises to his disciples which are no longer aimed at others: as when he called some to leave their occupations and personally to follow him.

There is much in Scripture that partakes of the local and the temporary, but such things should not raise a barrier between ourselves and the text, much less between us and the mind of God. The best statement on this problem came from Patrick Fairbairn in 1869:

The principle is . . . that the *particular* features in revelation, derived from its historical accompaniments, were meant to be, not to the prejudice or the subversion, but rather for the sake, of its *general* interest and application. They but served to give more point to its meaning, and render more secure its presentation in the world [much as illustrations serve to preserve the truth of sermons!]. So that, instead of saying, . . . I find therein a word of God to such a person, or at such a period in the past, therefore not strictly for me; I should rather, according to the method of Scripture, say, here, at such a time to such a party, was a revelation

in the mind and will of Him who is Lord of heaven and earth, made to persons of like nature and calling with myself--made, indeed *to* them, but only that it might *through* them be conveyed and certified to others; and coming as it does to me, a component part of the Word, which reveals the character of the Most High . . ."⁴³

Thus what was special in person, time, or place in the letters to the churches, the gospels, the psalmists, the prophets or the law, possessed special *significance* for later generations even if the *meaning* was not directed to them. Instead of narrowing the range of its application, the call to remember these detailed individual items was heard constantly in writers like the psalmists. This principle is illustrated in a striking way when Hosea (12:4) found special significance for his generation, removed by a millennium from the Jacob-Esau birth struggle (Gen. 25:26), and in Jacob's contest with the angel of God (Gen. 32:24ff.). Hosea declared "[Jacob] met God at Bethel and there God spoke with *us*" (Hos. 12:4). Some modern versions are so surprised by this last pronoun that they arbitrarily emend it to "*him*," but the tactic is a disparate one rebuked by numerous other biblical examples.⁴⁴ The same first person plural pronoun appears in Hebrews 6:18, where God gave a promise (Gen. 12, 15, 17) and an oath (Gen. 22) to Abraham so that "*we*" might have a strong consolation! Likewise Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 9:8-10 that the Mosaic instruction prohibiting the muzzling of oxen when they are threshing was addressed to the Corinthians for it was spoken especially (*pantōs*) for *our* sakes! There was no hermeneutical trickery in this type of teaching, as we have argued in detail elsewhere,⁴⁵ but it was another affirmation of our principle that past particularity (sometimes called the doctrine of *particularisms*) is no handicap for present significance. But the above distinction between *meaning* and *significance* must be rigidly followed. Thus there can be little doubt according to biblical method and declaration that while all of Scripture is given for our instruction, not all Scripture was addressed directly to us personally.

Customs, Cultures, and Biblical Norms

Our concern for the abiding message of the Bible must not run roughshod over the cultural vehicle in which that truth arrived. Neither must the cultural vehicle become an excuse for relativizing the truth of God to some ancient, but now defunct advice. The presence of a multiplicity of historical cultural

⁴³Patrick Fairbairn, "The Historical Element in God's Revelation," *Revelation of the Law* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), now available in *Classical Evangelical Essays*, ed. W. C. Kaiser, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 74-75.

⁴⁴For additional examples, see Matt. 15:7; 22:31; Mark 7:6; Acts 4:11; Rom. 4:23ff.; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 10:15; 12:15-17.

⁴⁵Kaiser, "Current Crises," pp. 11-18.

details involving politics, economics, society, foods, clothing, institutions, and so forth must be accounted for in a valid and legitimate hermeneutic. But how?⁴⁶

It would appear that we are presented with the following options when we turn to handle the matter of the real cultural items in Scripture:

1. One hermeneutical procedure would dictate that we retain, in some cases, both the theology taught (i.e. the principle affirmed or contextually implied) and the cultural-historical expression of that principle. For example, some would claim that 1 Corinthians 11:2-5 argues that the principle of divinely authorized lines of responsibility within the Godhead and the husband-wife relationship should be reflected in a certain coiffeur for women who pray or prophesy in public meetings.⁴⁷ Yet the matter of hair style was not actually intended by Scripture to be the abiding feature in this instance; the exhortation is only that a proper demeanor be evidenced by women who are out in the public eye in so prominent a way. But the debate must terminate on the meaning of the text, not our wishes or reactions: in 1 Corinthians 11:16 Paul affirms that neither he nor the Churches of God have any such rule on women's coiffeur (note the Greek text versus many translations).
2. In some cases, only the theology of the passage (i.e. the principle) will be observed, but the behavioral expression will be replaced with some more recent, but equally meaningful equivalent. Thus the injunction to "greet the brethren with a holy kiss" will usually be best observed in the West by a hearty handshake. The precedent for such cultural replacements in Scripture is already attested to in the New Testament use of the ceremonial and civil aspects of the moral law of God. Often the principle which undergirded these laws remained, but the illustration of it or the sanction (i.e. the penalty), or both, changed because the economies had also changed. Thus Paul urged that the mother and son guilty of incest be excommunicated from the church (1 Cor. 5) rather than stoned to death as the Old Testament required (Lev. 18:7, 29). Behind the Old Testament and the New Testament rule against incest stood the holy character of God and the sanctity of marriage. Hence the principle stood, even though the cultural practice for enforcing it varied.

⁴⁶For additional background see Robert S. Sproul, "Eternity 27" (1976), pp. 12-13; Alan Johnson, "History and Culture in New Testament Interpretation," *Interpreting the Word of God*, eds. Samuel Schultz and Morris Inch (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 128-161; Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Christianity and Cultural Differences," *Christianity Today* 16 (1971), pp. 901-904.

⁴⁷W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "Paul, Women and the Church," *Worldwide Challenge* 111 (1976), pp. 9-12.

Let it again be noted, however, that regardless of which position the interpreter assumes, if one still desires to teach with that authority which the text of Scripture possesses, one needs to observe those clues which the writer has left in the text in order to validate the option chosen. No interpreter may with the mere wave of the hand consign recognized principles of God's Word to a cultural level in the text or vice versa.

The following list of guidelines should aid us in the job of arriving at the single meaning of the author in those places where the text included cultural-historical elements.

1. In every case, the *reason* for the cultural command, custom or historical practice must first be sought in that very context. If the *reason* for questioned practice or custom has its basis in God's unchanging nature, then it is of permanent relevance for all believers in all times. Thus, Genesis 9:6 commands that all who shed man's blood shall suffer capital punishment, "because God made man in his own image." Consequently as long as men are still in the image of God, they continue to have such worth, value, and esteem in God's eyes that the state owes back to God the life of the murderer who viciously stole the life of a man made in God's image to God; not to the grieving family as a revenge and not to society as a warning to other potential criminals!
2. The cultural *form* of a command may be modified even though the principle of that form remains unchanged for all subsequent readers of that text. The principle of humility, for example, abides even though the form of washing one another's feet has changed, due to our location in a different culture with different types of roads and footwear (cf. John 13:12-16; Mark 10:42-45). Likewise James urged that believers observe the principle of non-partiality, yet the form of having the poor sit on chairs in our church services and the rich on the floor usually is not necessary nor feasible. Nevertheless, the principle abides.
3. When *practices*, which are identified as an integral part of a pagan culture and yet also concern God's moral nature, are forbidden in the Old Testament or New Testament, they are forbidden in our contemporary culture as well. In this category may be placed the strong biblical condemnation of bestiality, homosexuality, transvestment, and public nudity. Each one offends one aspect or another in God's moral nature, his attributes, and his provision of the image of God, sexuality, the family, or marriage.
4. A practice or cultural command is permanent when it is grounded in the nature of God or in the ordinances of creation. The issues, therefore, of divorce and remarriage, obedience to parents, and the legitimate respect owed to human government are non-negotiable. Thus, "What God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt. 19:4-6). And so it has been according to God's directive in creation.

Interestingly enough, the moral responsibility for deciding whether a believer should pay his taxes or give tolls to a government that he has now come to believe is in opposition to accepted moral law is lifted from his shoulders, for Romans 13:7 puts these taxes in the same category as debts paid for services rendered by other men who are in the service profession. We pay plumbers, electricians, or whatever for their services to us, but we do not thereby aid and abet their unsavory way of life if they also happen to be guilty of such.

5. The last guideline we shall mention is that there is biblical precedent for saying that some circumstances altered the application of those laws of God which rested not on his nature (i.e. the moral law of God) but which were true because he spoke to men and women in a particular context. An example of such a change in the application of a command can be seen in the command given to Aaron and his sons. They alone were to eat of the sacred bread of presence (Lev. 24:8-9), yet our Lord not only approved of Ahimelech offering that untouchable food to hungry David and his famished men (1 Sam. 21:1-6), but he used it to reinforce his own practice of performing emergency deeds or mercy on the Sabbath day (Matt. 12:1-5; Mark 2:23-25; Luke 6:1-4). What appeared, at first blush, to allow no exception, actually had a *ceteris paribus* ("other things being equal") understood.⁴⁸

Therefore there is an absolute loyalty in Scripture to the principles founded in the nature of God or the ordinances of creation; yet there is more flexibility in applying those other commands such as sanitary laws, dietary laws (see Mark 7:19 and Acts 10:15 where all foods were declared clean) and ceremonial regulation such as 1 Kings 8:64, where Solomon used the middle of the Temple court to sacrifice the numerous animals during the dedication ceremony, instead of the prescribed brazen altar, which was too small for the occasion (cf. 2 Chron. 4:1; 1 Kings 9:26). Yet the principle of worship is to be identical with that prescribed, even though the means used on this occasion varied. A similar instance can be seen in Hezekiah's permission to observe the passover in the *second* month (rather than the first) since there was not sufficient time for the people to prepare for it when they first learned of it (in 2 Chron. 30:2-4).

The Alleged Inadequate Language of Scripture on Factual Matters

Under the heavy pressure of the prestigious scholarship of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one approach to this problem has become all but unanimous by now: Genesis 1-11 is primeval history reflecting its ancient Near Eastern origins (mainly Babylonian). Furthermore, it is alleged, wherever Scripture becomes involved with such matters of fact as cosmology, natural history, the sciences, historiography, botany, astronomy, or a dozen other subjects, chances are that it reflects the level of cultural achievement

⁴⁸J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1962) 1.368-73.

in that day instead of statements which can be squared with reality. Among various exponents the wording may vary but the criticism usually has the same result: Scripture may not be trusted in these details no matter how much we may trust it and even depend with our lives upon it in spiritual matters--in fact, it is unfair to ask it also to serve this subordinate function.

How may legitimate hermeneutics be employed to decide such problems? After all, has not this essay stressed the fact that meaning must terminate on that which the author himself intended? How then could the author possibly be expected to speak beyond his years and learning? Is this not a case where the progress of revelation would see to such past excesses (or primitiveness) with its later correctives?

But such a questioner exhibits an inadequate view of the type of revelation these writers claimed. To have stood in the counsel of God, as these men claimed, and to have come up deficient, does not square with their views on the subject. And while *meaning* was restricted to the writer's own meanings, those meanings were those he received from God. One may not force a wedge between God and the writer--unless he cares nothing for the writer's own claims. Likewise, the offered help from progressive revelation is also deficient, according to our previous discussion for the reasons stated.

The problems faced here may be best resolved by noting the following set of guidelines for interpreting Scripture's language which points to facts outside the spiritual realm:

1. Determine the literary form to which the section under examination belongs. What contextual (or textual) clues does the writer offer that will aid us in deciding to what literary genera his statements belong? When the literary type is found, then we may proceed with an interpretation according to the rules of that literary type. One good example of this step can be seen in a comparison of the writer's method of organizing Genesis 1-11 with that of Genesis 12-50. As the text stands, the writer used the rubric of "These are the generations of (i.e. histories) of X" ten times throughout the book: six times in the first eleven chapters and four times in Genesis 12-50. Since the historical nature of the patriarchal narratives of Genesis 12-50 is usually conceded to be "substantially accurate" even by many non-evangelical scholars, we believe it is fair to argue that the writer wanted to indicate that his understanding of the pre-patriarchal materials was of a similar nature.
2. Examine individual words and phrases to see if they share any of the Near Eastern or classical backgrounds and then determine the type of similarity and the use made of them in Scripture.

As is well known in Psalm 74:13-14, it is declared that God had "crushed the heads of Leviathan," while Isaiah (27:1) spoke of that day when God would "crush Leviathan the crooked serpent and slay the monster that is in the sea." It is a fairly easy task to show the parallels between this type of verbage and Ugartic Text 67:

I:1-3 and the Anat text III:38-39. However, to insist that these writers also adopted a Canaanite mythology is to go beyond the facts. These same writers will only scorn pagan idols and myths. Therefore these are cases of a borrowed imagery and not of a borrowed mythology.⁴⁹ The conclusion of Father John McKenzie is correct: "In no sense can it be said that the Hebrews incorporated mythopoeic thought . . . into their own religious conceptions; they did, however, assimilate mythopoeic imagery and language."⁵⁰ Thus Leviathan, Rahab, and company were merely poetic garb which offered no more than convenient similes and metaphors for the theological claims of the writers. Often times, however, such an examination produces totally negative results, such as the alleged connection between the Babylonian goddess Tiamat and Hebrew *têhôm*, "deep" (Gen. 1:2).⁵¹ It turns out that there is no actual connection between the two. Likewise the case for a triple-decked universe is also falsely constructed, since Hebrew gives no credence to a hard dome complete with windows to serve as the sky, nor to a flat earth, nor to literal pillars to support this earth. Every step of the construction is faulty and without biblical precedent as we and others have argued elsewhere.⁵²

3. Note the presence of all figures of speech and indicate the part they play in forming the total statement of the author. This step is as exacting and as subject to hermeneutical controls as any analysis of a piece of prose text, for the figure of speech must be named, the definition given, the case for its presence in the verse noted and the function and meaning of the figure in this context explained! E. W. Bullinger can list approximately 150 different examples of figurative language in Genesis 1-11 alone!⁵³ But if one argues that the mere presence of figures of speech consigns the whole section to a type of myth, parable, or apocalyptic-type literature, the response is clear: it does not. Genesis 1-11, for example, is prose and narrative prose at that.

⁴⁹See Bruce Waltke, *Creation and Chaos* (Portland: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974), pp. 1-17. Also see John N. Oswalt, "The Myth of the Dragon and Old Testament Faith," *Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (1977), pp. 163-172. He concludes that Isaiah 51, Job 40, and Psalm 72 used the myth material of the Near East for non-mythical purposes and never once shared its mythical outlook, contrary to various assurances of B. S. Childs and Mary Wakeman.

⁵⁰John McKenzie, S. J. "A Note on Psalm 73 (74): 13-15," *TH ST* 2 (1950), p. 281.

⁵¹See our case and references in W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Literary Form of Genesis 1-11," *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1970), pp. 52-54 and nn. 16-20.

⁵²Kaiser, "Literary Form," pp. 57-58, nn 42-45.

⁵³E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968, r.p. 1898), pp. 1032-1033.

Its description of sequential acts with a special form of the Hebrew verb, its use of the Hebrew direct object sign, its use of the so-called relative pronoun, the stress on definitions and sequence make it more than evident that this cannot be a poetic genus. In like manner, the argument can be pressed in every other text. While Scripture often uses phenomenological language (even as we do in weather reports and daily conversation) to communicate factual data, this in no way commits the author or God to distorted science any more than our references to the sun "rising" and the four "corners" of the earth.

4. Whenever the Scriptures touch on factual matters, note the way the author uses these data. Too frequently the interpreter either prematurely dismisses such matters (e.g. it is often wrongly stated that Genesis 1 tells us "Who?" created the universe, but not "How?" it was done--an obvious slighting of the phrase repeated ten times "and God said" or the interpreter over enthusiastically embraces what is *described* as being part of what is also being *prescribed* by God (e.g. adopting a view of prenatal influence on birth marks due to Genesis 30 when it was only due to God's blessing, as Jacob himself will grudgingly concede later).

We conclude by affirming with all the forcefulness we can muster that our generation needs a whole new Hermeneutical Reformation. The current crisis in the doctrine of Scripture is directly linked to our poor procedures and methods of handling Scripture. This crisis has shown little respect for our traditional ecclesiastical categories, for it has spread like the plague from liberal to evangelical scholars alike. As a partial corrective for this astonishing situation, we urge that talk *about* the Bible be modified to this extent, that evangelicals in particular get equally busy identifying that *meaning* of the text itself which the original writer of Scripture intended, before we also go on to name those relationships between that meaning and ourselves, our country, our day, and our conception of things, i.e. the *significance* of that text for us. When liberalism excused itself from this demand, it turned its back on the revelation of God. If evangelicalism continues to dabble in the text as we have been for several decades, substituting Bible surveys and "what do you get out of it" type of pooled ignorance sessions for the hard work of exegesis, we will also pay the supreme price--there will be no answer from God (Micah 3:7). It could happen that the confessional stand on Scripture and its inerrancy would remain orthodox, even long after the practice and method of interpreting Scripture had turned neo-orthodox or liberal. Is that not a good enough reason to issue a call for legitimate hermeneutics?

THE INERRANCY OF THE AUTOGRAPH

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PAPER SUMMARY

While the Bible teaches its own inerrancy, the inscripturation and copying of God's word requires us to identify the specific and proper object of inerrancy as the text of the original autographa. This time-honored, common-sensical view of evangelicals has been criticized and ridiculed since the days of the modernist controversy over Scripture. Nevertheless, according to the attitude of the biblical writers, who could and did distinguish copies from the autographa, present copies of the Bible could serve the purposes of revelation and function with authority only because they were assumed to be tethered to the autographic text and its criteriological authority. The evangelical doctrine pertains to the autographic text, not the autographic codex, and maintains that present copies and translations are inerrant to the extent that they accurately reflect the biblical originals; thus the inspiration and inerrancy of present Bibles is

not an all-or-nothing matter. Evangelicals maintain the doctrine of original inerrancy, not as an apologetical artifice, but on theological grounds: (1) the inspiration of copyists and the perfect transmission of Scripture have not been promised by God, and (2) the extraordinary quality of God's revealed word must be guarded against arbitrary alteration. The importance of original inerrancy is not that God cannot accomplish His purpose except through a completely errorless text, but that without it we cannot consistently confess the veracity of God, be fully assured of the scriptural promise of salvation, or maintain the epistemological authority and theological axiom of *sola Scriptura* (for errors in the original, unlike those in transmission, would not be correctable in principle). We can be assured that we possess the word of God in our present Bibles because of God's providence; He does not allow His aims in revealing Himself to be frustrated. Indeed, the results of textual criticism confirm that we possess a biblical text that is substantially identical with the autographa. Finally, contrary to recent criticisms, the doctrine of original inerrancy (or inspiration) is not unprovable, is not undermined by the use of amanuenses by the biblical writers, and is not contravened by the New Testament use of the Septuagint as "Scripture." Therefore, the evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the original autographa is warranted, important, and defensible; further, it does not jeopardize the adequacy and authority of our present Bibles. Accordingly the doctrine of original inerrancy can be commended to all believers who are sensitive to the authority of the Bible as the very word of God and who wish to propagate it as such today.

THE INERRANCY OF THE AUTOGRAPHIA

Greg L. Bahnsen

In addressing the household and friends of Cornelius, Peter rehearsed how the anointed or Messianic ministry of Jesus of Nazareth eventuated in his death and resurrection (Acts 10:36-40). Christ then appeared to chosen witnesses whom he charged to preach unto the people, testifying that he was ordained of God as the eschatological judge of mankind (vv. 41-42); according to Christ all of the prophets bore witness to him, that through his name all who believe on him shall receive remission of sins (v. 43). Here we see the heart of the gospel proclamation rehearsed as well as the vital commission to have it publicized abroad for the eternal well-being of men. It should be obvious that the proclamation of this message in correct form was crucial if its hearers were to escape the wrath to come and enjoy genuine remission of their sins in Christ. A different or perverted gospel was accordingly nothing short of anathema (Gal. 1:6-9). The life-giving good news could not be after man, but must originate in the revelation of Jesus Christ (vv. 10-12).

Thus Peter informs us that the preaching of the gospel (of which the Spirit of Christ testified in the Old Testament) by the New Testament apostles was performed by means of the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven (1 Pet. 1:10-12). As in the case of all genuine prophecy, this gospel proclamation did not come by the will of men, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). In accord with the promise of Christ, this Spirit sent from heaven to inspire the preaching of the gospel guided the apostles into *all truth* (John 16:13). As the Spirit of truth he would not generate error in the life-giving good news of Christ as publicized by the apostles; their message was made inerrant. Furthermore, what the apostles spoke were the *words* taught by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:12-13), and this Spirit speaking in them gave both *what* was said as well as *how* it was said (cf. Matt. 10:19-20). Therefore, the verbal form and content of the apostolic publication of the gospel message should be deemed wholly true or without error according to Scripture's own witness.

Throughout its preaching and doctrine the Bible presupposes the authority of the Scriptures. For instance, the Old Testament is often cited in the New Testament with formulas such as "God says," "the Holy Spirit says," etc. (e.g., Acts 1:16; 3:24-25; 2 Cor. 6:16). What Scripture says is identified with what God says (e.g., Gal. 3:8; Rom. 9:16), and for that reason all theological arguments are settled decisively by the authority inherent in the formula "it stands written. . . ." The same authority attaches to the writings of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:14) since those writings are placed on a par with the Old Testament scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16; Rev. 1:3). The apostolic Scripture has the common formula "it stands written" applied to it (John 20:31). Therefore, the Old and New Testaments are presented in the Bible itself as the authoritative, written, word of God.

Because of their divine origin the scriptures are entirely trustworthy or sure (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8; Heb. 2:3; 2 Pet. 1:19) so that by means of them we are able to discern between that which is true and that which is false (cf. 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1). The scriptures are the standard of trustworthiness (Luke 1:1-4) which will never fail us or bring us embarrassment (Isa. 28:16; John 19:35; 20:31; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6; 1 John 1:1-3). Their minute accuracy extends to every jot and tittle (Matt. 5:18) in such a way that the indestructible endurance of any minor part is coextensive with that of the whole (cf. Isa. 40:8; Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:24-25). Every single word of the Bible is, by its own witness to itself, infallibly true. God's own declaration is "I, the Lord, speak the truth and declare what is right" (Isa. 45:19). Accordingly the Psalmist can recognize that "The sum of thy word is truth" (Ps. 119:160), and the wisdom literature counsels us "Every word of God has proven true" (Prov. 30:5). If our doctrinal outlook is informed by the word of God, then, we must confess that Scripture is entirely truthful or inerrant. The unchallengable testimony of Jesus was "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

The Westminster Confession of Faith has good warrant, it thus seems, for calling "all the books of the Old and New Testament" in their entirety "Holy Scripture or the Word of God written" (I.2), "all which are given by inspiration of God," who is "the author thereof," being Himself "truth itself" (I.4). In that case these books of the Old and New Testament are in their entirety "of infallible truth and divine authority" (I.5), so that "a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein" (XIV.2). According to this grand confession of the church, no error can be attributed to the Bible at any place. After all, if God sets forth false assertions in minor areas where our research can check Him (such as historical or geographical details), how do we know that He does not do so also in major concerns like theology?¹ If we cannot believe the Lord's word when he speaks of earthly things, how can we believe him when he tells us of heavenly things? (cf. John 3:12).

In this same vein Archibald Alexander wrote: "And could it be shown that the evangelists had fallen into palpable mistakes in facts of minor importance, it would be impossible to demonstrate that they wrote anything by inspiration."² Likewise Charles Hodge declared that the Bible was "free from all error whether of doctrine, fact or precept;" inspiration, according to him, was "not confined to moral and religious truths, but extends to the statements of facts, whether scientific, historical, or geographical."³ Archibald Alexander Hodge and B. B. Warfield maintained that the Bible was "absolutely errorless" in any of the subjects it touches upon in teaching--whether statements about history, natural history, ethnology, archaeology, geography, natural science, physical

¹E. J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 88-89.

²Archibald Alexander, *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1836), p. 229.

³Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans [1872-73]), pp. 152, 163.

or historical fact, psychological or philosophical principle, or spiritual doctrine and duty.⁴ This doctrine of scriptural inerrancy, whether presented in the pages of the Bible itself or of church confessions or of stalwart theologians is never an academic curiosity or aside; it goes to the very heart of the trustworthiness and truth of the life-giving message of the gospel found in God's written word. If the Bible is not wholly true, then our assurance of salvation has no dependable and divine warrant; it rests upon the minimal and fallible authority of men. Warfield saw this clearly:

The present controversy concerns something much more vital than the bare "inerrancy" of the Scriptures, whether in the copies or in the "autographs." It concerns the trustworthiness of the Bible in its express declarations, and in the fundamental conceptions of its writers as to the course of the history of God's dealings with his people. It concerns, in a word, the authority of the Biblical representations concerning the nature of revealed religion, and the mode and course of its revelation. The issue raised is whether we are to look upon the Bible as containing a divinely guaranteed and wholly trustworthy account of God's redemptive revelation, and the course of his gracious dealings with his people; or as merely a mass of more or less trustworthy materials, out of which we are to sift the facts in order to put together a trustworthy account of God's redemptive revelation and the course of his dealings with his people.⁵

The church, following God's word, confesses the entire inerrancy of Scripture as a crucial and inalienable aspect of the authority of God's revelation, by which we come to a genuine knowledge of Christ and the assured enjoyment of eternal life (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15-16).

INSCRIPTURATION AND DISTINCTION

For the sake of preserving the apostolic testimony and extending the fellowship of the church around the "word of life" (1 John 1:1-4), the proclamation and teaching of the apostles has been reduced to written form. Such inscripturation of God's revelation was required if the church was to teach it until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20). Van Til points out that inscripturation of God's word gives it the greatest possible permanence of form, being less liable to perversion than oral tradition would be.⁶

⁴Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, "Inspiration," *The Presbyterian Review* 7 (April 1881):227,236,238.

⁵B. B. Warfield, "The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," reprinted in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 11, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), pp. 581-582.

⁶Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), p. 27.

The great attribute of the written word is *objectivity*. The oral word too has its measure of objectivity, but it cannot match either the flexibility or the durability of the written word. Memory is imperfect. The desire to change or pervert is ever present.⁷

The drawback to having revelation in oral form (or tradition) is that it is subject to various kinds of corrupting influences that stem from man's imperfect abilities and sinful nature (e.g., lapses of memory, intentional distortion). To curb these forces, taught Kuyper, God cast His word into written form--thereby achieving greater durability, fixity, purity, and catholicity.⁸ A written document is capable of universal distribution through repeated copying, and yet it can be preserved in various kinds of depositories from generation to generation. As such it can function both as a fixed standard by which to test all doctrines of men and as a pure guide to the way of life.

Yet this admirable feature of inscripturation does in itself generate a difficulty for the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy which we must now face. A written word may have great advantages over oral tradition, but it is not immune from what Kuyper called "the vicissitudes of time." The spreading of God's word by textual transmission and translating opens up the door to variance between the original form of the written word and secondary forms (copies or translations). This variance requires a refinement of the biblical doctrine of biblical inerrancy, for now we must ask what constitutes the proper object of this inerrancy which we attribute to Scripture. Does inerrancy (or infallibility, inspiration) pertain to the original writings (autographa) or to copies of them (and perhaps translations) or to both?

To be sure, in answering such a question some have been led to unscholarly excess in the interest of protecting the divine authority of Scripture. Certain superstitious stories led Philo to postulate inspiration of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Some Roman Catholics, following the declaration of Pope Sixtus V that the Vulgate was authentic, attributed inspiration to this translation. Some Protestants have argued for the inspired infallibility of the Hebrew vowel points in the Old Testament (e.g., the Buxtorfs, John Owen; the Formula Consensus Helvetica more cautiously spoke of the inspiration of "at least the power of the points"). The errorless transmission or preservation of the original text of Scripture has been taught by men such as Hollaz, Quenstedt, and Turretin, thereby failing to recognize the significance of textual variants in the copies of Scripture which have existed throughout the history of the church.⁹

⁷Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), pp. 134-135.

⁸Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 405ff.

⁹Henry Preserved Smith, *Inspiration and Inerrancy* (Cincinnati: Robert Clark and Co., 1893), pp. 97-98, 107-112; R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, rev. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), p. 87; Jack Rogers, "The Church Doctrine of Biblical Authority," in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), pp. 30, 31, 36; Clark Pinnock, "Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology," in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Rogers, p. 62; Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 156; Dewey M. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 163-164.

Notwithstanding these examples, the view which has persisted throughout the centuries and which is common among evangelicals today is that the inerrancy (or infallibility, inspiration) of the scriptures pertains to the text of the original autographa. In a letter to Jerome (Letter 82) Augustine said that if he found anything in the biblical books which seemed contrary to the truth "I decide that either the text is corrupt, or the translator did follow what was really said, or that I failed to understand it." Here the distinction between the autographa and copies of Scripture is clear, as is also the restriction of inerrancy to the former. Likewise, in an effort to preserve the original from error, a concern for textual corruption is evidenced by Calvin in his commentaries at Hebrews 9:1 and James 4:7.¹⁰ Luther labored diligently as a translator and exegete to recover the original reading of the scriptural text.¹¹ Richard Baxter said "No error or contradiction is in it [Scripture], but what is in some copies, by failure of preservers, transcribers, printers, and translators." Warfield quotes this, and he goes on to allude to the work of other men like John Lightfoot, Usher and Walton, Rutherford and the like, thereby illustrating how the question of restricting inspiration to the autographa was a burning question in the age of the Westminster Assembly.¹² He also expounded the Westminster Confession of Faith I.8 as teaching that immediate inspiration applies only to the autographa of Scripture, not to the copies, that the original text has been providentially kept pure in the transmitted texts (but not, as Smith and Beegle contended, in every or any one copy),¹³ and that present translations were practically adequate for the needs of God's people in every age.¹⁴

For themselves A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield asserted that:

Nevertheless the historical faith of the church has always been, that all the affirmations of Scripture of all kinds . . . are without error, when the *ipsissima verba* of the original autographs are ascertained and interpreted in their natural and intended sense. . . . No "error" can be asserted, therefore, which cannot be proved to have been aboriginal in the text.¹⁵

Dr. Edwin Palmer cites Kuyper and Bavinck to the same effect, and he quotes Dijk as saying that the authority of the Bible "pertains always and only to the original (and not to the translation) and to the pure text that is to be

¹⁰Cf. John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), pp. 27-28.

¹¹Cf. M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg, 1944), pp. 57-59.

¹²Warfield, "Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," pp. 586-587.

¹³B. B. Warfield, "The Westminster Confession and the Original Autographs," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. II, pp. 591-592; Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, p. 144.

¹⁴Warfield, "The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," pp. 580-582, 586-587; "The Westminster Confession and the Original Autographs," pp. 588-594.

¹⁵Hodge and Warfield, "Inspiration," pp. 238, 245.

found in the autographa."¹⁶ Others who can be readily quoted as distinguishing between the autographa and copies of Scripture, and as restricting inerrancy (or infallibility, inspiration) to the autographa, would include J. Gresham Machen, W. H. Griffith Thomas, James M. Gray, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Loraine Boettner, Edward J. Young, R. Surburg, J. I. Packer, John Stott, Carl H. Henry, etc.¹⁷ What Henry says is representative: "Inerrancy pertains only to the oral or written proclamation of the originally inspired prophets and apostles. Not only was their communication of the Word of God efficacious in teaching the truth of revelation, but their transmission of that Word was error-free. Inerrancy does not extend to copies, translations or versions, however."

It is evident, then, that H. P. Smith and C. A. Briggs were both quite mistaken when they alleged that the assertion of an original inerrancy for Scripture was a new doctrine generated by "modern scholastics."¹⁸ Warfield's response was as usual appropriate:

This is a rather serious arraignment of the common sense of the whole series of preceding generations. What! Are we to believe that no man until our wonderful nineteenth century, ever had acumen enough to detect a printer's error or to realize the liability of hand-copied manuscripts to occasional corruption? Are we really to believe that the happy possessors of "the Wicked Bible" held "thou shalt commit adultery" to be as divinely "inerrant" as the genuine text of the seventh commandment--on the ground that the "inerrancy of the original autographs of the Holy Scriptures" must not be asserted "as distinguished from the Holy Scriptures which we now possess"? . . . Of course, every man of common sense from the beginning of the world has recognized the difference between the genuine text and the errors of transmission, and has attached his confidence to the former in rejection of the latter.¹⁹

¹⁶Edwin H. Palmer, Response to Editor, *The Banner*, vol. 112, no. 43 (Nov. 11, 1977):25.

¹⁷J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith and the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936), pp. 38-39; W. H. Griffith Thomas, "Inspiration," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 118, no. 469 (Jan.-Mar., 1961), p. 43; James M. Gray, "The Inspiration of the Bible," in *The Fundamentals*, vol. 2 (Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917), p. 12; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), p. 71; Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 14; E. J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, p. 55; R. Surburg, *How Dependable is the Bible* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1972), p. 68; J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 90; John R. Stott, *Understanding the Bible* (Glendale, CA: Gospel Light Publications, 1972), p. 187; Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 11 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976), p. 14.

¹⁸Smith, *Inspiration and Inerrancy*, p. 145; C. A. Briggs, *The Bible, the Church, and the Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), p. 97.

¹⁹Warfield, "Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," p. 585.

The time-honored and common-sensical perspective among Christian believers who have considered the inescapable question raised by the inscription of God's word (viz., does inspiration, infallibility, and/or inerrancy pertain to the autographa or copies of the Bible, or both?) has been that inerrancy is restricted to the original or autographical text or Scripture.

Nevertheless, this basic evangelical doctrine of Scripture has come under severe ridicule and criticism from many quarters in recent years, thus calling us to a defense of it. H. P. Smith accused the doctrine of original inerrancy of being speculative and being concerned with a text that no longer exists and can conceivably never be recovered.²⁰ David Hubbard reiterates that the standard evangelical view contends for the inerrancy, not of any present texts, but of the original autographs to which no generation of the church has ever had access.²¹ Accordingly the approach to scriptural inerrancy which restricts it to the autographa is trivial and without value, as charged by C. A. Briggs nearly a century ago: "We will never be able to attain the sacred writings as they gladdened the eyes of those who first saw them, and rejoiced the hearts of those who first heard them. If the external words of the original were inspired, it does not profit us. We are cut off from them forever."²² The distinction between inspired or infallible autographa and uninspired or fallible copies was characterized by Brunner as useless, idolatrous, and untenable in the light of textual criticism.²³ It is irrelevant or of no practical value since the praiseworthy quality (be it inspiration, infallibility, or inerrancy) applies to no extant text. It is absurd because it is impossible to define the character of a text that has disappeared. The originals are unimportant since we cannot completely restore them, and obviously God does not think that it is necessary for us to have them. Moreover, we can still receive spiritual blessing from errant copies, so we could as well receive such a blessing from errant originals. It turns out, then, that the restriction of inerrancy to the autographa is simply an intellectually dishonest escape from embarrassment or an apologetical "cop-out." Such a line of reasoning is often encountered.²⁴ A large dose of sarcasm can be readily mixed in with it.

Their [the assailants of the trustworthiness of the scriptures] contention has ever been twofold: that God never gave an errorless Bible, and if he did, that errorless Bible is no longer in the possession of men. The air has been thick with satirical references to autographic copies which no man has ever seen, which are hopelessly lost, which can never be recovered. And the defenders of the trustworthiness of Scripture have

²⁰Smith, *Inspiration and Inerrancy*, p. 144.

²¹David Hubbard, "The Current Tensions: Is There a Way Out?" in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Rogers, p. 156.

²²C. A. Briggs, "Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to Their Inspiration," *The Presbyterian Review*, vol. 2 (1881): pp. 573-574.

²³Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), p. 274.

²⁴Cf. Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, pp. 85-86; Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 81.

been sarcastically asked what the use is of contending so strenuously for the plenary inspiration of autographs which have thus forever passed away.²⁵

Great mirth has been evoked in this vein over the so-called "lost Princeton Bible." Lester DeKoster has gone to the limit of his reach in pressing sarcasm into service against those who restrict inerrancy to the autographa: nobody can use those lost autographa, the Bible on our table is not the inerrant and infallible word of God, and so today the church has no inerrant Bible by which to live, and preaching is thereby made impossible because it would be founded on the uninspired word of man.²⁶ It now appears that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy which at first appeared so clearly in accord with the Scripture's own witness is threatened with a necessary qualification or restriction that vitiates the significance and importance of the doctrine. What can we say in response?

In the following sections of the discussion we will explore the *biblical attitude* toward autographa and copies, for this should be the starting point of all genuinely Christian theological commitments. From that platform we can go on to *explain* the evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the autographa, indicating that our evaluation of copies and translations is not an all-or-nothing affair. The *rationale* for the evangelical restriction can then be rehearsed, followed by various indications of the *importance* of this doctrine regarding Scripture. Different aspects of the *assurance* which we can have with respect to possessing God's word today will subsequently be broached. Finally we will conclude with an examination of some explicit *critiques* of the evangelical restriction of inerrancy (or infallibility, inspiration) to the scriptural autographa. We will conclude that the doctrine of original inerrancy is both warranted and defensible, a doctrine to be commended to all believers who are sensitive to the authority of the Bible as the very word of God.

THE BIBLICAL ATTITUDE

There are scattered indications in the Scripture of an interest in or recognition of copies and translations of God's word in distinction from the autographical text. There are also useful inferences which we can draw from various passages which tell us something of the scriptural attitude toward these extant copies and subsequent translations. What we primarily learn is that these non-autographical texts are deemed adequate to perform the purposes for which God originally gave the scriptures. What King Solomon possessed was obviously a copy of the original Mosaic law (cf. Deut. 17:18), and yet it was considered genuinely to contain "the charge of Jehovah . . . according to that which was written in the law of Moses" (1 Kings 2:3).²⁷ The book of

²⁵ Warfield, "The Westminster Confession and the Original Autographs," p. 588.

²⁶ Lester DeKoster, Editorials in *The Banner* for August 19, 26, and September 2, 1977.

²⁷ I am dependent for some of these examples upon J. Barton Payne, "The Plank Bridge: Inerrancy and the Biblical Autographs," *United Evangelical Action* 24 (December 1965):16-18.

Proverbs pauses at one point to draw clear attention to the fact that "These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out" (Prov. 25:1); in this case the copies are themselves divinely authoritative and canonical. The law of God which was in the hand of Ezra was obviously a copy of it, and nevertheless it functioned with authority in his ministry (Ezra 7:14). And when Ezra read from this law to the people, so as to exercise divine guidance in their lives, he apparently read to them by way of translation so that they could understand the sense in the Aramaic to which they had become accustomed in exile: "And they read in the book with interpretation, and they gave the sense so that they understood the reading" (Neh. 8:8).²⁸ In all of these examples the secondary text does the work of God's written word and shares its original authority in a practical sense.

The New Testament also evidences an interest in secondary copies of God's written word. Paul was most concerned that he be brought "the books, and especially the parchments" (2 Tim. 4:13). In the practice of collecting New Testament epistles for the various churches (cf. Col. 4:16) encouragement would naturally be given to the copying of the original manuscripts. There is every reason, given the experience of Jesus and the apostles, to assume that these copies were to be profitable for teaching and for instruction in righteousness (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16b). When New Testament writers appeal to the authority of the Old Testament they, just like we do today, used the texts and versions which were ready at hand.²⁹ Jesus preached from the existing scrolls and treated them as "Scripture" itself (Luke 4:16-21). The apostles used the scriptures which were in hand for arguing (Acts 17:2) and demonstrating points (Acts 18:28); their hearers checked the apostolic proclamation by searching the Old Testament scriptures which they presently possessed (Acts 17:11). Because their opponents shared a belief in the functional authority of the available manuscripts of the scriptures, Jesus and the apostles battled on the common ground of the extant copies without fretting about the autographa themselves.³⁰ This is illustrated in the present imperative to search the scriptures as testifying of Christ (John 3:39) and in the rhetorical and leading questions "Have you not read . . .?" and "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" (e.g., Matt. 12:3, 5; 21:16, 42; Luke 10:26). It may very well be true that the "holy writings" which Timothy had known from his childhood were not only copies of the Scripture, but the Septuagint translation at that.³¹ Still they could make him wise unto salvation.

What these things show us is that the message conveyed by the words of the autographa, and not the physical page on which we find printing, is the strict object of inspiration. Therefore, because that message was reliably reflected in the copies or translations available to the biblical writers, they could be used in an authoritative and practical manner. Contrary to the extreme and

²⁸G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, trans. and ed. Jack Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 217.

²⁹F. F. Bruce, "Foreword" to Beegle's *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, p. 8.

³⁰Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, p. 156.

³¹Cf. Berkeley Mickelsen, "The Bible's Own Approach to Authority," in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Rogers, pp. 83, 95.

unfounded inferences drawn by Beegle,³² the exhortation and challenges based on the copies of Scripture pertain to the conveyed *message* and tell us nothing about the extant texts *per se*; much less do they demonstrate that the biblical authors made no distinction between the original text and its copies. If this were true, the unique and unalterable authority of the biblical message would not be guarded so strenuously by these same authors. Because Christ raised no doubts about the adequacy of the scriptures as his contemporaries knew them, we can safely assume that the first-century text of the Old Testament was a wholly adequate representation of the divine word originally given; Jesus regarded the extant copies of his day as so approximate to the originals, in their authoritative message that He could appeal to those copies as authoritative.³³ The respect which Jesus and his apostles held for the extant Old Testament text is at base an expression of their confidence in God's providential preservation of the copies and translations as substantially identical with the inspired original. It would thus be fallacious to press the point that inerrancy was not restricted by them to the autographa and to say that their teaching about inspiration had reference to the imperfect copies in their possession.³⁴

The fact is that, although present copies and translations had a practical authority and adequacy for the purposes of divine revelation, the Bible pervasively evidences a concern to *tether the current copies to the autographical text*. There is, as one would expect, no explicit biblical teaching regarding the autographa and copies thereof, but the point set forth just now is still abundantly illustrated in the course of Scripture's teaching and statements. In that case we have an answer to the question of Pinnock, is the restriction of inerrancy to the autographa strictly scripture?, and a rebuttal to the allegation of Chapman, that it is not biblical to restrict inspiration to the autographa.³⁵ According to Beegle, there is no explicit teaching in the New Testament that distinguishes between autographa and copies; the original writings are not set apart in a special position, for the authors of Scripture deemed the extant errant manuscripts as inspired.³⁶ Our examination of the scriptural passages pertinent to this issue will undermine such claims as these also.

We can begin our survey in the Old Testament, where we soon discover that,

Most of the references to inspiration that are found in the Old Testament concern the Semitic autographs. The majority relate to the biblical writers' own compositions which they identify, not as products of divine dictation,

³²Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, Chapter 7.

³³John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 164; Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. II, p. 14.

³⁴As suggested by Pinnock in "Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology," p. 63.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 63; Sidney Chapman, "Bahnsen on Inspiration," *Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. XLVII, no. 3 (July-September 1975):167.

³⁶Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, pp. 154-155, 164-166.

but as the equivalent of God's own words: e.g., David, "The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me" (II Samuel 23:2); Isaiah, "Seek ye out . . . (this) book of Jehovah, and read" (Isaiah 34:16); Jeremiah, "(God's) words . . . even all that is written in this book" (Jeremiah 25:13, cf. 30:2, 36:2), or perhaps even Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:11.

Others concern writings that were still fresh enough to imply the original manuscripts either as present, e.g., Joshua's referring to Moses' writings as "the book of the law of God" (Joshua 24:26), or as immediately accessible, e.g., Joel's quoting the contemporary (?) prophecy of Obadiah 17, "as Jehovah hath said" (Joel 2:32).³⁷

The assumption throughout Scripture is that men are obliged to follow the original text of God's written word; present copies function authoritatively because they are viewed as reflecting correctly the autographa. This is a foundational perspective that comes to the surface from time to time. For instance, what Israel was required to do was what God "commanded their fathers by Moses" (Judg. 3:4). This implicitly points to the original message which came from the author himself. Isaiah was told explicitly to write, and his book was to be for the time to come as a witness forever (Isa. 8:1; 30:8); the autographical text was the permanent standard for the future. Daniel "understood by the books" (which we can assume to have been copies), but these very books indicate that the God-given words were "the word of Jehovah (which) came to Jeremiah" (Dan. 9:2, where the perfect aspect indicates completed action with respect to the coming of the word of God to Jeremiah specifically).

Likewise the New Testament assumes that correct teaching can be found in copies of Scripture then in existence because they trace back to the autographical text. Matthew 1:22 quotes Isaiah 7:14 as "spoken of the Lord by the prophet" (cf. 2:15). Jesus taught that we are to live by every "word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4), thus tethering the authority of the scriptures in hand to the original utterance given by divine inspiration. What people read as "Scripture" in the book of Moses is thought of as "spoken unto them by God" or what God originally spoke in the bush to Moses (Matt. 22:29-32; Mark 12:24-26). It was thought that it is inspired David himself who speaks in the present book of Psalms (Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42), just as when the one who is reading the scriptural copy understands it he will see that which was spoken by Daniel the prophet himself (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). In each case the autographical text is assumed to be present in the extant copy which is consulted. When Christ asks, "Have you not read . . . (in extant copies no doubt)?" (Matt. 19:4, cf. v. 7), he is actually seeking what Moses himself commanded the Jews (Mark 10:3). The Mosaic words which he quoted from Genesis 2:24 were viewed by him as fully equivalent to what "God said" as the original author of Scripture (Matt. 19:4-5). Those who possess the existing scrolls "have Moses and the prophets" themselves, who accordingly should be heard as such (Luke 16:29). The actual distance between the autographa and

³⁷Payne, "The Plank Bridge," p. 17.

copies can be for present purposes ignored because the original text is thought to appear in these copies. After all, it is the things which are written by the prophets themselves that bind us (Luke 18:31). In expounding the extant scriptures Christ was actually expounding what the prophets had spoken, and he could condemn those who were slow to believe what the prophets themselves had spoken (Luke 24:25-27). In the present scriptures as they are written Christ's followers could find what is fulfilled by Christ, namely all things "which were written" in all the Old Testament (Luke 24:44-46). The "writings" which were presently in hand and which indicted their hearers were assumed to be identical with what Moses wrote (John 5:45-47), and the law that was relevant in a present controversy was understood to be given by Moses (John 7:19, cf. v. 23).

The passage in John 10:34-36 is particularly instructive. Jesus said, "Is it not written in your law," thereby indicating their own manuscript copies of the Old Testament. He then quotes Psalm 82:6, resting the thrust of his argument upon one word in that text. The premise of his argument is that God "called them gods, unto whom the word of God came." That is, Jehovah called the judges who were contemporary with Asaph, the psalm-writer, 'gods,' and they were the ones unto whom the word of God came. It is thus Asaph's original that is equated with the word of God, and Jesus was able to accept and work upon the foundation of the Jews' belief in the authority of "their law (copies)" because he deemed them to reflect accurately the original. The "Scripture" to which he appeals in this controversy is connected intimately with what was actually said to those "to whom the word of God came." The inscripturated word of God that originally came to the Israelites is now found written in their present-day law-books. Here we find quite an explicit indication that the authority of present copies is traced to the autographa lying behind them.

The importance of the autographa for the New Testament scriptures is already hinted in the fact that the Holy Spirit will take the original words of Jesus and bring them to the remembrance of the apostles for the sake of their writings (John 14:25-26). When the apostles cited the Old Testament in their preaching and writing it was with the assumption that they were propounding the initially composed Scripture. Accordingly Peter described "this Scripture" (Ps. 69:25) as that "which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spoke before" (Acts 1:16; cf. 4:25); the earlier autograph (given beforehand by the Holy Spirit) is the primary referent of his preaching from present copies of the Psalm. Similarly Paul cites Isaiah 6:9-10, saying "well spoke the Holy Spirit by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers" (Acts 28:25; cf. Rom. 3:2); he proceeds on the understanding that his quotation is true to the original deliverance given many years previously. The citation of Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews 10 is viewed as a rendition of what the Holy Spirit originally said through the prophet (Hebrews 10:15). Indeed, the comfort which could be gained from the then present scriptures was tethered to whatsoever was written *aforetime* (the original text written in former days, Romans 15:4). In like fashion that for which Paul claims inspiration is his own autographical text--"the things which I write unto you are the commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37; cf. 2:13). Over and over again we are confronted with the obvious fact that the biblical writers make use of present copies, but with the significant assumption that their authority is tied to the original text of which they are a reflection. It is especially important to note this fact with respect to two key verses

teaching the inspiration of the scriptures. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul stresses that all the scriptures were God-breathed, placing obvious emphasis upon their *origin* and thus autographic form. The reason why the sacred writings known to Timothy (perhaps the Septuagint) can make him wise unto salvation is found in the fact that they are rooted in the original, divinely-given Scripture--those writings which were the result of its inspiration, which Paul here associates with Scripture's original form as coming from God. Likewise in 2 Peter 1:19-21 we are told that "we have the prophetic word" (presumably in copies) and must heed it and treat it as authoritative. Why is this so? Because men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit. The sufficiency and function of the extant biblical manuscripts is not divorced from but rather explained in terms of their original manuscripts which were divine products. So then, we have noted a long list of illustrations which point to the fact that the adequacy of present copies of the Bible is countenanced in terms of the autographical text which is presumed to stand behind such copies.

The importance and criteriological authority of the autographical texts of Scripture is brought out in four specific Old Testament situations. They each show us that the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of the Bible must be found in the autographical text, which is normative for God's people and for identifying anything which would lay claim to the title of 'God's word.' The first known case of the need of textual restoration occurs in Exodus 32 and 34. The first tablets of the law were written by God himself (Exod. 32:15-16), but were subsequently destroyed by Moses in his wrath (v. 19). God provided for the rewriting of the words of that original tablet (Exod. 34:1, 27-28), and the Scripture makes the point that these second tablets were written "according to the first writing" (Deut. 10:2, 4). This is a significant model for all later copying of the biblical autographs; they should reproduce the words that were on the first tablet or page in order to preserve the full divine authority of the message therein conveyed. Likewise, in Jeremiah 36:1-32 we see that the prophet dictated the word of God to Baruch, who wrote it in a scroll; when this scroll with its unfavorable message was read to the king, Jehoiakim cut it into pieces and burned it. The word of God then came to Jeremiah, instructing him to make a new copy of the Scripture, and we see quite plainly that the standard for such a copy was the original text: "Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll" (v. 28). Even as common sense would tell us, a genuine copy of a text ought to reproduce correctly the original text. The paradigmatic or criteriological nature of the autographic text of Scripture is taught in Deuteronomy 17:18. Although the Mosaic autograph was placed by the Levites next to the ark of the covenant (Deut. 31:24-26), a copy of this law was to be written by the king in a book, "out of that which is before the priests the Levites." The copy would offer authoritative guidance only as it correctly reflected the original message; without a studied concern for a copied text which accurately transmitted the autograph the king could not be sure of himself in refraining from turning aside to the right or to the left from God's commandment (Deut. 17:19-20). Copies of Scripture, then, were not to deviate from the original text in the slightest.

Another Old Testament situation which manifests the esteem and deference which the Jews afforded the autographic text is recorded in 2 Kings 22 and

2 Chronicles 34, the recovery of the temple-copy of the Book of the Law during the reign of Josiah. The existence of the Book of the Law was previously known; it had been placed by the side of the ark of the covenant and used for public reading from time to time (Deut. 31:12, 24-26; 2 Chron. 35:3). However, even though there were likely private copies of the law in the hands of priests and prophets,³⁸ the official, autographical copy had been lost from sight. Chronicles indicates that Josiah had already begun to follow the law in a hazy fashion, according to a knowledge of it by tradition probably (34:3-7). Subsequent to that the temple began to be repaired--during which time the Book of the Law was found by Hilkiah. Josiah's desire to repair the temple already demonstrated his disposition to foster the worship of Jehovah. But great excitement was generated by Hilkiah's discovery, and in time Josiah became quite concerned over the words of "this book that is found" (2 Kings 22:13). Apparently it brought to his attention material which had not been known in the other available copies of the law: most likely the curse-threats of the covenant (2 Kings 22:11, 13, 16, 18-19; cf. Deut. 28; Lev. 26). What is relevant for our concerns here is that this recovered Book of the Law which corrected and supplemented Josiah's biblical outlook was, I believe, the original, officially preserved, Mosaic autograph.³⁹ What was found was not simply "a book"--a copy of some generally known volume--but "*the* Book of the Law" (a manuscript somehow different from others, 2 Kings 22:8). In particular, it was the Book of the Law "by the hand of Moses" (2 Chron. 34:14). While the evidence is not fully decisive and the recovered book was not necessarily the autograph, the weight of evidence favors this interpretation; there appears little obvious counter-evidence to it. This Old Testament incident magnifies the value, corrective function, and normative authority of the autographic text of Scripture over all copies or traditional understanding of what God had said; the sufficiency of copies is proportionate to their accurate reflection of the original, and deviation from the autograph jeopardizes the profit of such a copy for doctrinal instruction and direction for righteous living. The biblical writers clearly knew how to distinguish, then, between autographa and copies, and they perceived the significance of the difference. The recovery of the autographic Scripture was a momentous occasion, not merely the addition of one more copy among many to an undifferentiated repository of Bibles!

There are yet other ways, in addition to these four Old Testament passages, in which the Scripture teaches or illustrates the explicitly recognized or assumed normativity of the autographa for subsequent copies. First, the Bible warns us throughout against altering the text of God's word. It is not to be added to or diminished from (Deut. 4:2, 12:32) according to God's command. Proverbs thus counsels us, "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (30:6); honesty requires that one stick to the originally given message of God without supplementing the text with new features.

³⁸C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of the Kings*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 478.

³⁹This was the view of many expositors, cf. Lange's Commentary, vol. VI: Karl Chr. W. F. Bähr, with Edwin Harwood and W. G. Sumner, *The Books of the Kings* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1872), book II, p. 258; Payne, "Plank Bridge," p. 17.

The permanent norm of judgment could hardly be expressed in these words otherwise: "To the law and to the testimony! if they speak now according to *this word*, surely there is no morning for them" (Isa. 8:20). The New Testament scriptures evidence the same jealousy for the unaltered purity of the originally given text, as seen in the well-known warning of the book of Revelation (22:18-19). It is the normativity of the autographic message that constitutes the presupposition of the conflict with tradition seen in Christ and the apostles (e.g., Matt. 15:6; Col. 2:8). That tradition conveyed the Old Testament text in some form, as evidenced in Matthew 5:21ff.; yet the tradition was not to be allowed to *obscure* the authentic word of God (e.g., Mark 7:1-13). Accordingly we see Christ condemning the Pharisaical teaching as it actually altered the text of the Old Testament scriptures (e.g., with respect to hatred in Matt. 5:43, and with respect to divorce in Matt. 19:7). In the same vein with the Old Testament warnings, Christians are instructed not to tamper with the word of God (2 Cor. 4:2). The New Testament lays great stress on not accepting teachings which run counter to the apostolic message (e.g., Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8; 1 John 4:1-6), and in that case we would expect, even as we find, strong warning against departing from what has been said in the apostolic text (2 Thess. 3:14, where the norm is "the word by this epistle"). Believers are to be on the guard against things purporting to be Scripture but are not; Paul said not to be troubled by "an epistle as though from us" (2 Thess. 2:2). Yet Paul usually wrote his own authentic letters by means of an amanuensis (e.g., Rom. 16:22), which would at least create ripe conditions for forgery. However Paul's usual custom was to add his own authenticating signature to his letters (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; Gal. 6:11),⁴⁰ as he says in 2 Thessalonians 3:17, "The salutation of me, Paul, with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write." Significantly Paul says this in the same epistle where he warns against spurious apostolic epistles. Here Paul draws attention to the quite literal "autograph" as authenticating the message which is to be believed and obeyed by Christ's people! The criteriological textual authority, we conclude, is uniformly presented in Scripture as the original or autographic text of the biblical books. Copies are to be evaluated and heeded in the light of the autographa which ought to be reflected in them. Their authority is derivative from the original text, whose own authority is derivative from its origin in God himself.

We may now summarize the biblical attitude with respect to the autographa and copies in this fashion. The authority and usefulness of extant copies and translations of the scriptures is apparent throughout the Bible; they are adequate for bringing men to a knowledge of saving truth and directing their lives. Yet it is also evident that this use of scriptural authority deriving from the copies has underlying it the implicit understanding and often explicit qualification that these extant copies are authoritative in that (or to the extent that) they reproduce the original, autographic text. Biblical writers understood the distinction between the original and a copy, and they manifest a commitment to the criteriological authority of the original. These two features--the adequacy of extant copies, but the crucial and primal authority of the autographa--are rather nicely combined in the standard formula used in

⁴⁰Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, "Ancient Amanuenses and the Pauline Epistles," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 288-292.

the New Testament for citing Scripture to clinch an argument: "it stands written." This form (the perfect tense) appears at least 73 times in the gospels alone, and its well-known significance is that something has been established, accomplished, or completed and continues to be so or have enduring effect. "It stands written" expresses that what has been written in the original Scripture remains so written in the present copies; conversely, that to which the writer appeals in the present copies of Scripture as normative is so because it is taken to be the enduring witness of the autographic text. New Testament arguments which are based on a phrase (e.g., Acts 15:13-17), a word (e.g., John 10:35), or even the difference between the singular and plural form of a word (e.g., Gal. 3:16) in the Old Testament would be completely emptied of genuine force if two things were not true: (1) that phrase, word, or form must appear in the present copies of the Old Testament, or else the argument falls to the ground with the intended opponent because it is spurious to begin with (i.e., there is no evidence to which appeal can be made against him), and (2) that phrase, word, or form must be assumed to have been present in the original text of the passage cited, or else the argument loses its authoritative foundation in the word of God (i.e., this element of the text has no more authority than that of any mere man at best, and is an embarrassing scribal error at worst). If the New Testament authors are not appealing through their extant copies to the original text, their arguments would be futile. We see, then, that the Bible demonstrates two points. First, the substantial reliability of the extant biblical text is a permanent need of God's people which is satisfied; we *can* believe our copies of the gospel and be saved without the presence of the autographic codex, for the Bible indicates that copies can reflect the autographic text and function authoritatively. Second, the genuine features and qualities of the Scripture--such as inspiration, infallibility, or inerrancy--are uniformly identified with God's own original word as found in the autographic scriptural text, for this alone can be identified and esteemed as God's own word to men.⁴¹

A brief word of postscript to this section of the discussion can be added regarding the use of the Septuagint in the New Testament and the problem of New Testament quotations of the Old Testament which appear to deviate from the original. Neither one of these practices undermines our previous conclusions. The Septuagint was utilized to facilitate the communication of the New Testament message, for it was the popular version of the day. This does not confer inspiration upon it (a view held by men like Philo and Augustine); even Beegle admits that if the New Testament writers considered the Septuagint inspired, it was "in a secondary or derivative sense."⁴² As Jerome maintained in his dispute with Augustine over this matter, only the Hebrew text was strictly inspired; the authors of the New Testament, we must assume, used the Septuagint only when this translation did not deviate essentially from the meaning of the Hebrew text. Just as men can write in their own vocabulary without introducing falsehoods and can quote questionable sources without incorporating erroneous portions from them,⁴³ so also the New

⁴¹Cf. Payne, "Plank Bridge," p. 18.

⁴²Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, pp. 170-171, cf. p. 173.

⁴³Cf. Payne, "Plank Bridge," p. 17.

Testament writers could use the vocabulary and sources of the Septuagint without falling into error. Being borne along by the Holy Spirit in their work (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21) they would have indeed been shielded from such error, for that Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (John 16:13). Textual diversity was recognized by the New Testament writers, but it was not a source of perplexity given their direction by the Spirit; they could select the reading which best carried the divine meaning,⁴⁴ often quoting the Septuagint as the word of God, and yet sometimes even correcting the Septuagint rendition!

A greater difficulty is found in the fact that the Septuagint is sometimes quoted in a way which initially appears contrary to the Hebrew text and hardly permissible.⁴⁵ This fits into the problem posed by many critics, that at points the way in which the New Testament quotes the Old Testament shows little concern for accuracy with the original.⁴⁶ Fitzmyer says, "To modern critical scholarship their way of reading the Old Testament often appears quite arbitrary in that it disregards the sense and the content of the original."⁴⁷ This is not the place to launch into a full discussion of the well-known, difficult passages; some still call for further study in the light of the broader attitude which Scripture itself teaches toward the issues of inerrancy and the original text. As always, the biblical phenomena must be considered in terms of the basic and background testimony of Scripture about itself--that is, in the light of Scripture's own given presuppositions. Suffice to say here that an artificial standard of precision which would have been foreign to the culture and literary habits of the day in which Scripture was penned need not be imposed on the Bible in the name of inerrancy or the name of fidelity to the autographa. Methods of quotation were not as precise in that age as they are today, and there is no reason why New Testament citations had to be verbally exact. The issue is whether the meaning of the autographic text is or is not assumed to lie behind the use of extant texts and translations utilized by the New Testament writers, and above we have been given grounds for adopting this as the assumption of the biblical writers. In focusing on a particular (sometimes narrow, sometimes general) point or insight, the New Testament statement of what is found in the Old Testament need only embody an accuracy which suits the writer's present purposes. Likewise, preachers today are not being unfaithful to their standard of Scripture when they mix passing allusion with strict quotation from the Bible, or when they rearrange phrases or paraphrase contextual matters in getting to their specific target statement, phrase, or word; even their specific scriptural point can be communicated in a way which is true to the sense without being a pristine rendition of the specific text itself. Therefore, the New Testament use of the Septuagint or of inexact renditions of the Old Testament does not belie the commitment of the writers involved to the criteriological authority of the autographa, even

⁴⁴Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 83.

⁴⁵Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 223, 225.

⁴⁶E.g., L. I. Evans, "Biblical Scholarship and Inspiration," in Smith, *Inspiration and Inerrancy*, pp. 47, 66-67; Mickelsen, "The Bible's Approach to Authority," pp. 85ff.

⁴⁷J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Use of Explicit OT Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the NT," *New Testament Studies* (1961), p. 332.

though it does underline their unanxious acceptance of texts or versions which were not strictly autographic as being adequate for the practical purposes at hand in their teaching. Such were adequate precisely because they could be assumed to portray the true *sense* of the original.

EXPLANATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE RESTRICTION

Given the previously explored biblical attitude toward the autographa and copies thereof, we can proceed to explain the sense in which evangelicals restrict inerrancy to the scriptural autographa and offer reasons for that restriction.

There is circulating at present a rather serious misunderstanding of the evangelical restriction of inerrancy (or inspiration, infallibility) to the autographic text and the implications of that restriction. DeKoster claims that there are only two options: either the Bible on our pulpits is the inspired word of God, *or* it is the uninspired word of man. Because inspiration and inerrancy are restricted to the autographa (which are lost, and not found on our pulpits), then our Bibles must be the uninspired words of man and not the vitally needed word of God.⁴⁸ Others have misconstrued an epistemological argument for biblical inerrancy as holding that if the Bible contains even one mistake it cannot be believed true at any point, we cannot rely upon any part of it, and God cannot use it to communicate authoritatively to us.⁴⁹ From this mistaken starting point the critic goes on to say of the evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the autographa--due to errors in present Bibles--that it entails that our Bibles today cannot be trusted at all, cannot communicate God's word to us, and cannot be the inspired word of God. And if the present Bible with its errors is not inspired, then we are left with nothing (since the autographa are lost).

Such a dilemma rests on numerous fallacies and misunderstandings. In the first place it confuses autographic *text* with autographic *codex*; the loss of the latter does not automatically entail the loss of the former. Certain manuscripts may have decayed or been lost, but the words of those manuscripts are still with us in good copies of the same. Secondly, evangelicals do not by their commitment to inerrancy necessarily commit the logical fallacy of saying that if one point in a book is mistaken, then all points in it are likewise mistaken. Thirdly, the predicate "inerrant" (or "inspired") is not the kind of predicate that can be applied only in an all-or-nothing fashion; it is simply a false dilemma to say that a book either is totally inspired or totally uninspired (just as it is fallacious to think a book must be either completely true or completely false). There are predicates which are applied in degrees (e.g., "bald," "warm," "fast"). "Inerrant" and "inspired" can be counted among them. A book may be unerring for the most part and yet slightly

⁴⁸DeKoster, Editorial in *The Banner* (September 2, 1977), p. 4.

⁴⁹E.g., Smith, *Inspiration and Inerrancy*, pp. 135-136, cf. pp. 62-63; Pinnock, "Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology," p. 65; Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 79-81; Paul Rhees, Foreword to *Biblical Authority*, ed. Rogers, p. 12.

flawed, or a book can have inspired material to some measure and uninspired material to some measure (e.g., an anthology of sacred texts from the world religions would be inspired to the degree that it prints selections from the Bible). This is not to say that inerrancy or inspiration themselves as qualities admit of degrees (as though some passages of the Bible could be "more inspired" than others, or some statement with a given sense in Scripture could be a mixture of truth and error), but rather that the subjects of these predicates (viz., certain books) have elements or parts to which the predicates completely apply and elements or parts to which the predicates do not apply. That baldness can be applied in degrees means that certain objects (e.g., heads) have hairy areas and non-hairy areas, not that there is some quality itself which is a cross between hair and non-hair.

It needs to be explained quite unambiguously that the evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the autographa (1) is a restriction to the autographic *text*, thereby guarding the uniqueness of God's verbal message,⁵⁰ and (2) does *not* imply that present Bibles, because they are not fully inerrant, fail to be the word of God. The evangelical view does not mean that inerrancy or inspiration of present Bibles is an all-or-nothing matter. My Old Cambridge edition of a Shakespearean play may contain mistaken or disputed words in comparison with the original text of Shakespeare, but that does not lead me to the extreme conclusion that what lies on my desk is not a work of Shakespeare. It *is* Shakespearean--to the degree that it reflects the author's own work, which (because of the generally accepted high degree of correlation) is a qualification that need not be explicitly and often stated. So also my American Standard Version of the Bible contains mistaken or disputed words with respect to the autographic text of Scripture, but it is still the very word of God, inspired and inerrant--to the degree that it reflects the original work of God, which (because of the objective and universally accepted, outstanding degree of correlation in the light of textual criticism) is a qualification that is very seldom in need of stating.⁵¹ As virtually anybody would understand, a copy counts as the words of a work only in the amount that it has not altered the very words of the author of that work.⁵²

Therefore, let us clearly explain the implication of the evangelical view of inerrancy's restriction to the autographa. Patton put it this way: "Just so far as our present Scripture text corresponds with the original documents is it inspired. . . . Have we a correct text? If we have not, then just in proportion to its incorrectness are we without the word of God."⁵³ Contemporary evangelicals have made the same kind of statement. Pinnock writes, "Our Bibles

⁵⁰See the discussion of word-groups over against parchment and ink in Greg L. Bahnsen, "Autographs, Amanuenses, and Restricted Inspiration," *Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 2 (April-June 1973):101-103.

⁵¹Cf. John Warwick Montgomery, "Biblical Inerrancy: What is at Stake?" in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 36-37.

⁵²B. B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1887), p. 3.

⁵³Francis L. Patton, *The Inspiration of the Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1869), p. 113.

are the Word of God to the extent that they reflect the Scripture as originally given,"⁵⁴ and "a good copy of an original work can function like the original itself, to the extent to which it corresponds to the original and is in accord with it."⁵⁵ In the same way translations, as observed by Henry, "may be said to be infallible only to the extent that they faithfully represent the copies available to us."⁵⁶ Edwin Palmer accordingly answered DeKoster's false dilemma about having the inerrant and inspired word of God on his desk or not by pointing out that copies and translations are inspired, infallible, and inerrant to the extent that they have faithfully reproduced the original text; to the extent that they add to, subtract from, or distort the original they are not the inspired word of God.⁵⁷

Is there any good reason for this point of view? What rationale can be offered by evangelicals for restricting inerrancy (inspiration, infallibility) to the biblical autographa? Critics have often assumed that inerrancy is restricted to the autographa for apologetical reasons, and they have condemned this restriction as desperate weaseling and an "apologetical artifice" (to use Brunner's words), an intellectually dishonest cop-out arising from embarrassment.⁵⁸ Rogers attacks the evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the autographa as attempting to secure an "unassailable apologetic stance" (which, Pinnock observes, would produce a position that is unfalsifiable yet meaningless).⁵⁹ However this abuse is misplaced. Evangelicals appeal to the missing autographa in a limited and specific fashion, where independent evidence (apart from apologetical embarrassment) supports the suggestion of transcriptional error.⁶⁰ Inerrancy critic Stephen Davis recognizes here that the restriction to the autographa is seldom a ridiculous apologetical maneuver on the part of evangelicals because textual criticism has for the most part established the biblical text.⁶¹ Since that which the apologist defends is the teaching of the autographic *text* (apart from the presence or absence of

⁵⁴Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 86.

⁵⁵Pinnock, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), p. 15.

⁵⁶Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* II, p. 14.

⁵⁷Palmer, Reply to editor, *The Banner* (November 11, 1977), p. 24. Norman Geisler and William Nix express this point of view in terms of a contrast between actual inspiration (reserved for the autographs) and virtual inspiration (applied to good copies or translations) in *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 33.

⁵⁸E.g., Smith (and Evans), *Inspiration and Inerrancy*, pp. 63, 144; Harry R. Boer, *Above the Battle?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 84; Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, pp. 148-149; Gerstner also cites Briggs, Loetscher, and Sandeen in "Warfield's Case for Biblical Inerrancy," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. Montgomery, pp. 136-137.

⁵⁹Rogers, "The Church Doctrine of Biblical Authority," p. 39; Pinnock, "Three Views of the Bible," p. 65.

⁶⁰Montgomery, "Biblical Inerrancy: What is at Stake?", p. 36.

⁶¹Davis, *The Debate About the Bible*, p. 25.

the autographical manuscripts), he can hardly be charged with tactical retreat if he holds, with Warfield, that "The autographic text of the New Testament is distinctly within reach of criticism in so immensely the greater part of the volume, that we cannot despair of restoring to ourselves and the Church of God, His book, word for word, as He gave it by inspiration to men."⁶² The restriction of inerrancy to the autographa does not leave the evangelical with only a chimera to defend. Moreover, evangelicals like Warfield are not so deluded as to think that recovery of the autographic text would (though impossible with absolute perfection) rid them of all biblical difficulties for which to give an answer.

That some of the difficulties and apparent discrepancies in current texts disappear on the restoration of the true text of Scripture is undoubtedly true. That all the difficulties and apparent discrepancies in current texts of Scripture are matters of textual corruption, and not, rather, often of historical or other ignorance on our part, no sane man ever asserted.⁶³

Explaining the evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the autographa by the motivation to have an easy apologetical escape from difficulties, then, can be safely dismissed. It simply is not so.

If the rationale is not apologetical, then what is it? It is quite simply theological. God has not promised in His word that the scriptures would receive perfect transmission, and thus we have no ground to claim it *a priori*. Moreover, the inspired word of God in the scriptures has a uniqueness which must be guarded against distortion. Consequently we cannot be theologically blind to the significance of transmissional errors, and we cannot theologically assume the absence of such errors. Hence we are theologically required to restrict inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy to the autographa.

There is nothing absurd about holding that an infallible text has been fallibly transmitted, and the fact that a document is a copy of holy writ does not entail that it is wholly right. Although we can agree with Beegle that there is no inherent reason why God could not have preserved the scribes who copied the Bible from defects, he is certainly mistaken to think we should assume that the copies of Scripture were the result of inspiration unless the Bible explicitly teaches us that they were not.⁶⁴ The fact is that inspiration is an extraordinary gift or predicate which cannot simply be assumed to apply to anybody. If one wishes to maintain that the scribes of the Bible are inspired in their work and automatically infallible in their results, then the burden of theological proof lies on him. However as things stand in the Scripture, inspiration refers to the words produced under the Holy Spirit and not to the production of scribal copies.⁶⁵ Contrary to Beegle again, the fact that the original Scripture had its origin in God does not entail that the

⁶²Warfield, *Introduction to Textual Criticism*, p. 15.

⁶³Warfield, "Inerrancy of Original Autographs," p. 584.

⁶⁴Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, pp. 163, 165.

⁶⁵Pinnock, *Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, p. 15.

copies *qua* textual copies also have their origin in God, but that the *message* they embody traces ultimately back in some measure to God's given revelation.⁶⁶ E. J. Young's reasoning is more cogent:

If the Scripture is "God-breathed," it naturally follows that only the original is "God-breathed." If holy men of God spoke from God as they were borne by the Holy Spirit, then only what they spoke under the Spirit's bearing is inspired. It would certainly be unwarrantable to maintain that copies of what they spoke were also inspired, since these copies were not made as men were borne of the Spirit. They were therefore not "God-breathed" as was the original.⁶⁷

It now appears clear that the restriction of inerrancy to the autographa is based on the unwillingness of evangelicals to contend for the precise infallibility or inerrancy of the transmitted text,⁶⁸ for Scripture nowhere gives us ground to maintain that the transmission and translation of itself would be kept without error by God.⁶⁹ There is no scriptural warrant for holding that God will perform the perpetual miracle of preserving His written word from all errors in transcribing from one copy to another.⁷⁰ Since the Bible does not claim that every copier, translator, typesetter, and printer will share the infallibility of the original document, Christians should not claim it either; such a doctrine is not guaranteed by Scripture itself, and Protestants are committed to methodological principle of *sola Scriptura*. This then is the basic rationale for restricting inerrancy to the original, prophetically certified, document of God's word. There is biblical evidence for the inerrancy of the autographa, but not for the copies; this makes the distinction and restriction theologically warranted and necessary.⁷¹

Everybody knows that no book was ever printed, much less hand-copied, into which some errors did not intrude in the process; and as we do not hold the author responsible for these in an ordinary book, neither ought we to hold God responsible for them in this extraordinary book which we call the Bible.⁷²

What this quote from Warfield indicates is the common-sensical nature of restricting the evaluative qualities of a literary work to its autographic text. Common sense tells us that the identity of a literary text is determined by its original autograph ("the first completed, personal or approved

⁶⁶Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, pp. 154, 155.

⁶⁷Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, pp. 56-57.

⁶⁸Gerstner, "Warfield's Case for Biblical Inerrancy," p. 137.

⁶⁹Montgomery, "Biblical Inerrancy: What is at Stake?", p. 35.

⁷⁰Patton, *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p. 112; Gray, "Inspiration of the Bible," pp. 12-13.

⁷¹Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 82

⁷²Warfield, "Inerrancy of Original Autographs," p. 582.

transcription of a unique word-group composed by its author").⁷³ When a slight mistake or distortion creeps into a copy of some literary work it thereby creates a somewhat different literary text with some degree of originality; choosing to ignore minor changes, we can continue to label the original and the slightly distorted copy in a similar fashion, but that does not mean that anybody can afford to be indifferent to an accurate text.

What modern author would view with equanimity an edition of one of his plays that substituted several hundred words scattered here and there from the corruptions of typists, compositors, and proof-readers? . . . One can no more permit 'just a little corruption' to pass unheeded in the transmission of our literary heritage than 'just a little sin' was possible in Eden.⁷⁴

The actual value of an author's literary production cannot be safely estimated if one is not sure whether the text before him represents the author's work or the "originality" of a scribe. Say you are evaluating what you take to be Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and you come across the phrase "solid flesh" in the famous line "O! that this too too solid flesh would melt" (Act I, Scene 2). On the basis of this reading you might well give a more or a less favorable evaluation of this work supposedly by Shakespeare, but if you did you would not only be embarrassed, you would actually be unfair to Shakespeare himself. As it happens Shakespeare wrote "sallied [i.e., sullied] flesh," despite the widespread replication of the "solid flesh" reading.⁷⁵ Shakespeare has Hamlet reflect on the fact that his natural or inherited honor has been soiled by the taint of his mother's dishonorable blood, as the original reading indicates, thereby making quite a difference to the sense of the line. The merit or demerit of the "solid flesh" reading belongs to some copyist or editor, not to the author himself. Common sense keeps us from attributing secondary alterations in the text and their evaluation to the author himself, for he is responsible only for the autographic text of his literary work. This is equally true of God's word. What we evaluatively say about it should be restricted to what God actually originated in the literary text, and it should not include the "originality" of intermediate scribes. As Warfield notes, "It is *the Bible* that we declare to be 'of infallible truth'--the Bible that God gave us, not the corruptions and slips which scribes and printers have given us."⁷⁶ Absolute truth can be attributed to God's word, but not to the words that are the result of errors by scribes and printers.

⁷³Cf. Bahnsen, "Autographs, Amanuenses, and Restricted Inspiration," pp. 104-105.

⁷⁴Fredson Bowers, *Textual and Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), p. 8.

⁷⁵Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet's 'Sullied' or 'Solid' Flesh," *Shakespeare Survey* IX (1956): 44-48. The embarrassment that can come to a literary critic who assimilates copyist errors to the original is illustrated by the case of Matthiessen in John Nichol's "Melville's 'Soiled' Fish of the Sea," *American Literature* XXI (1949): 338-339.

⁷⁶Warfield, "Inerrancy of Original Autographs," p. 582.

The identity of the Bible or the scriptures, then, must certainly be determined by the autographic text, and the evaluative predicate of "inerrancy" can be legitimately applied only to *that text* (regardless of how many manuscripts contain it).⁷⁷ Where we cannot be certain that a manuscript reflects that autographic text, we must refrain from judgment and reserve the evaluation for the original.⁷⁸ This is especially true with respect to God's word in the scriptures because they are uniquely the communication of God to man in human language. They have the extraordinary status of not being merely human in quality (cf. Gal. 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:13). The isolation of these writings as specially inspired is the very basis of the church's distinction between canonical and non-canonical compositions. Only what God himself has said constitutes the standard for verifying Christian truth-claims as theologically authoritative.⁷⁹ And for this reason the textual readings which result from scribal mistakes cannot be elevated to divinely authoritative status simply because the transferred title of "Holy Scripture" is placed over them. What constitutes God's own word is not thus elastic and changing but rather unique and standardized. Even evangelicals who deny inerrancy must be sensitive to this rationale, for they too will want to protect the unique quality of God's inspired and infallible (although errant) word. If they did not, then they would be committed to the superstitious and absurd consequence that anything which is placed between the covers of a book formally labeled "The Bible" is God's inspired word. Successive copying errors could conceivably destroy the message of God completely; would it then still qualify as "inspired?" Obviously not. Evangelicals committed to an errant Scripture can offer no reason to think that copying mistakes must always be restricted to matters of history and science, while being absolutely precluded from texts touching on matters of faith and practice (the alleged exclusive domain of "infallibility" according to these theorists). The infamous "Wicked Bible" of 1631 rendered the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt commit adultery" (omitting the crucial word 'not'), and for this scandalous misprint the printers were severely fined by the Archbishop. Can any evangelical seriously hold that this reading is inspired and infallible? If not, then *all* evangelicals are committed in some sense to *restrict their bibliology to the autographa*. Even errancy evangelicals speak of the *unique* quality of God's written and inspired word,⁸⁰ admitting that although salvation and instruction can come through a less than perfect translation "It is the word of God only to the degree that it reflects and reproduces the original text."⁸¹ Those who, like Davis, say that "These manuscripts [the autographs] play no particular role in my understanding of the Bible. I believe that presently existing Bibles are infallible works that constitute the word of God for all who read them"⁸² are simply being short-sighted or naive. Restriction-to-the-autographic-text is a common-sensical move made at some point by all evangelicals, for all want to guard the extraordinary quality of God's written word.

⁷⁷Bahnsen, "Autographs, Amanuenses, and Restricted Inspiration," pp. 102-103.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁷⁹Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* 11, p. 13.

⁸⁰Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 200.

⁸¹Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God*, p. 207.

⁸²Davis, *Debate About the Bible*, p. 116.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESTRICTION

We have now rehearsed the biblical understanding of the relation of the autographa to copies and the significance of each, we have explained the sense in which evangelicals restrict inerrancy to the autographa and the implication this has for current copies, and we have located the theological rationale for that restriction. But the question quickly arises as to whether this is not, after all, just a trivial discussion because the autographa are beyond our reach. Piepkorn declared, "since the original documents are inaccessible and apparently irrecoverable, the ascription of inerrancy to these documents is in the last analysis *practically* irrelevant."⁸³ Evans rhetorically asked, how does it affect the value of today's errant record that the error was not there originally?⁸⁴ The direct response to this perspective is that restricting inerrancy to the autographa *enables us to consistently confess the truthfulness of God*--and that is quite important indeed! The inability to do so would be quite theologically damaging. Only with an inerrant autograph can we avoid attributing error to the God of truth. An error in the original would be attributable to God himself because He, in the pages of Scripture, takes responsibility for the very words of the biblical authors--whereas errors in copies are the sole responsibility of the scribes involved, in which case God's veracity is not impugned.

Some years ago a "liberal" theologian . . . remarked that it was a matter of small consequence whether a pair of trousers were originally perfect if they were now rent. To which the valiant and witty David James Burrell replied, that it might be a matter of small consequence to the wearer of the trousers, but the tailor who made them would prefer to have it understood that they did not leave his shop that way. And then he added, that if the Most High must train among knights of the shears He might at least be regarded as the best of the guild, and One who drops no stitches and sends out no imperfect work.⁸⁵

If the scriptures, like the works of Homer and others, came to us merely under the work of God's general providence in history, then errors in the original might make little difference to us, but inspiration is another thing altogether.⁸⁶ "Amazing indeed is the cavalier manner in which modern theologians relegate this doctrine of an inerrant original Scripture to the limbo of the unimportant," exclaimed Young, for the veracity of God⁸⁷ and the perfection of the Godhead⁸⁸ are involved in that doctrinal outlook.

⁸³A. C. Piepkorn, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?" *Concordia Theological Monthly* XXXVI (1965):590.

⁸⁴Evans, "Biblical Scholarship and Inspiration," p. 62.

⁸⁵Gray, "Inspiration of the Bible," p. 13.

⁸⁶Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, pp. 89-90.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 86, 89; cf. Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 135.

⁸⁸Gray, "Inspiration of the Bible," p. 13.

He, of course, tells us that His Word is pure. If there are mistakes in that Word, however, we know better; it is not pure. . . . He declares that His law is the truth. His law contains the truth, let us grant Him that, but we know that it contains error. If the autographa of Scripture are marred by flecks of mistake, God simply has not told us the truth concerning His Word. To assume that He could breathe forth a Word that contained mistakes is to say, in effect, that God Himself can make mistakes.⁸⁹

And the minute that we say that, then we have in principle lost our ultimate foundation of theological knowledge, and our own personal assurance of salvation as objectively grounded in the scriptures is swept away--God's well-meant promises of such might still be in error.

The fact that we cannot now see the inerrant autographa does not destroy the importance of the claim that they existed as such. As Van Til remarks, when one is crossing a river which has swollen to the point of placing the surface of the bridge under a few inches of water, he might not be able to see the bridge but he is very glad nonetheless that it is there! He would not think for a moment that this unseen bridge is without any significance and try to cross the river arbitrarily at just any other point. In looking at my present Bible I cannot see the autographa exactly, but I am most glad that those inerrant originals were there undergirding my walk and constituting a bridge that can bring me back to God. I would not arbitrarily try to be reunited with Him by just any other course. The value of my present Bible derives from its dependence in the long run upon the errorless original, as is illustrated by Laird Harris:

Reflection will show that the doctrine of verbal inspiration is worth while even though the originals have perished. An illustration may be helpful. Suppose we wish to measure the length of a certain pencil. With a tape measure we measure it at 6 1/2 inches. A more carefully made office ruler indicates 6 9/16 inches. Checking it with an engineer's scale, we find it to be slightly more than 6.58 inches. Careful measurement with a steel scale under laboratory conditions reveals it to be 6.577 inches. Not satisfied still, we send the pencil to Washington, where master gauges indicate a length of 6.5774 inches. The master gauges themselves are checked against the standard United States yard marked on a platinum bar preserved in Washington. Now, suppose that we should read in the newspapers that a clever criminal had run off with the platinum bar and melted it down for the precious metal. As a matter of fact, this once happened to Britain's standard yard! What difference would this make to us? Very little. None of us has ever seen the platinum bar. Many of us perhaps never realized it existed. Yet we blithely use

⁸⁹Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, p. 87.

tape measures, rulers, scales, and similar measuring devices. These approximate measures derive their value from their being dependent on more accurate gauges. But even the approximate has tremendous value--if it has had a true standard behind it.⁹⁰

We conclude that, even though men can be blessed without an errorless text and can formulate the great doctrines of the faith, the inerrant autographa are not thereby rendered unimportant, and the claim that God did not have to give the scriptural originals inerrantly is specious.⁹¹ God can work through our errant copies to bring us to saving faith, but that does not diminish the qualitative difference between the perfect original and imperfect copy--just as an imperfect map may bring us to our destination all right, but it is nevertheless qualitatively different from a strictly accurate map (e.g., in the fine details). There is tremendous importance in confessing the doctrine, and drawing the distinction implicit in it, that inerrancy is restricted to the scriptural autographa. We can admit with Davis that God did not keep the copyists from error and that nevertheless the church has grown and survived on the basis of an errant text,⁹² but to infer from these things that an inerrant autograph was not vital to God or necessary for us would be to commit the fallacy of hasty generalization. The importance of original inerrancy is that it enables us to consistently confess the truthfulness of God himself; we thereby can avoid saying that the one who calls himself "the Truth" made errors and was false in his statements.

However some may still ask, if God took the trouble and deemed it crucial to secure the entire accuracy of the original text of Scripture, why did He not take greater care to preserve the text errorless? Why did He allow it to be corrupted in transmission?⁹³ Numerous evangelicals have suggested that God has done so in order to prevent His people from falling into idolatry with respect to the manuscripts.⁹⁴ However in so saying they make the same mistake made by many critics of original inerrancy at other points--namely, of confusing the autographic text with the autographic codex. The original manuscripts might well have perished, thereby preventing an idolatry of them, but the main question is why the *text* of the autographa has not been inerrantly preserved.⁹⁵ Perhaps a more convincing answer, then, would be that the need

⁹⁰Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, pp. 88-89.

⁹¹Cf. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, p. 158; Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, p. 89.

⁹²Davis, *Debate About the Bible*, pp. 78-79.

⁹³E.g., Pinnock, "Three Views of the Bible," p. 66.

⁹⁴E.g., Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* III, p. 67; Pache, *Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, pp. 138-139; Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, p. 186; Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to Bible*, pp. 32-33; E. Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity* (London: Paternoster, 1954), p. 110; Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 83; Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 36.

⁹⁵Cf. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, p. 159; Davis, *Debate About the Bible*, pp. 79-80.

for textual criticism due to an errant text of Scripture would have the effect of drawing attention away from trivial details of the text (by which, e.g., it could be used as a magic amulet or cabbala) to its conveyed message.⁹⁶ However, in the long run, we simply have to turn away from such questions which presume to have an *a priori* idea of what to expect from God, and confess, "Why God was not pleased to preserve the text of the original copies of the Bible, we do not know."⁹⁷ "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God, but the things that are revealed belong unto us" (Deut. 29:29). And God has not chosen to share with us His motivation for allowing the text of the autographa to become slightly corrupted in particular copies of the Scripture. Possession of an answer as to why God permitted this is surely not a necessary condition to holding to the restriction of inerrancy to the autographa if it is maintained on independently sufficient grounds.

Some evangelicals have written as though two very different kinds of restriction upon the inerrancy of Scripture are equally damaging to the doctrine and are on a practical par. Errancy evangelicals restrict the utter trustworthiness of Scripture to revelational matters which make us wise unto salvation, whereas inerrancy evangelicals restrict inerrancy to the autographic text. Since it is thought that these two kinds of restriction have the same practical effect, errancy evangelicals sometimes maintain that the opposition of inerrancy evangelicals to their viewpoint has been trivialized. After all, it is alleged, the epistemological status of the two views is the same since errors in our present copies of Scripture must be recognized, thereby jeopardizing the unchallengeable authority of these manuscripts. However attenuation to the issue will show that the importance of original inerrancy has not been undermined by such reasoning. If the *original* manuscripts of Scripture were errant, then we do not know the *extent* of error in them; the range of possible faults in them is virtually unbounded, for who can say at what point an errant God stops making mistakes?⁹⁸ Who can presume to know how to set God's mistakes in order? (cf. Rom. 3:4; 9:20; 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). On the other hand, errors in *transmission* are *in principle correctable* by textual criticism. Wenham has grasped the point here:

It has been said that, since there is no need for a guaranteed inerrancy now, there is no reason to suppose that inerrancy was ever given. But the distinction between the Scripture as it was originally given and the Scripture as it is now is not mere pedantry. We must hold, on the one hand, to the absolute truth of direct divine utterance. God does not approximately speak the truth. Human expositions of what God has said, on the other hand, do approximate to truth, and one can speak meaningfully of different degrees of approximation. If the term 'essential infallibility'

⁹⁶E.g., Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, p. 186.

⁹⁷Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, p. 61.

⁹⁸Cf. Ibid., p. 88; Pache, *Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, pp. 135-136; L. Gaussen, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, [1841] 1971), pp. 159-160.

is applied to a divine utterance, it has no precise meaning. It is like a medicine that is known to be adulterated, but adulterated to an unknown degree. When, however, 'essential infallibility' is referred to Scriptures once inerrant but now slightly corrupt, the meaning can, within limits, be precise. We know to a close approximation the nature of the tiny textual adulterations. The bottle is, as it were, plainly labelled: 'This mixture is guaranteed to contain less than 0.01% of impurities.' And our Lord himself (in the case of the Old Testament) has set us an example by taking his own medicine. A man's last will and testament is not invalidated by superficial scribal errors; no more are the divine testaments in the Bible.⁹⁹

Thus an inerrancy restricted to matters of faith and practice (assuming wrongly for the moment that these can be separated from historical and scientific details of God's word) is not after all on the same epistemological footing with an inerrancy extending to everything taught in God's word but restricted to the autographic text.

It is impossible to maintain the theological principle of *sola Scriptura* on the basis of limited inerrancy, for an errant authority--being in need of correction by some outside source--cannot serve as the only source and judge of Christian theology.¹⁰⁰ The philosophical basis for certainty, Christ speaking inerrantly in the identifiable historical revelation of God's written word, is in principle preserved on the doctrine of original inerrancy, but vitiated by a doctrine of limited inerrancy whereby God can speak mistakenly about some issues. The former view provides a starting point and final authority for finding truth and overcoming philosophical skepticism, whereas the latter leaves us in no better epistemological position or provides no more assured, final theological authority than is conceivably provided in pagan literature.¹⁰¹ From a theological standpoint, why should we diligently seek the autographic text if the unerring word from God would not thereby be secured? "If error had permeated the original prophetic-apostolic verbalization of the revelation, no essential connection would exist between the recovery of any preferred text and the authentic meaning of God's revelation."¹⁰²

By way of summary, the doctrine of original inerrancy permits doubts only about the *identification* of the text--doubts which can be allayed by textual critical methods. In this case God's word remains innocent of error until

⁹⁹Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, p. 186.

¹⁰⁰Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 74.

¹⁰¹Cornelius Van Til, "Introduction" to B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), p. 46; Van Til, *The Doctrine of Scripture* (den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1967), p. 39; Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), pp. 34-36.

¹⁰²Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* II, p. 14; cf. Van Til, "Introduction" to *Inspiration and Authority of Bible*, p. 4.

proven guilty; that is, what I find written in my present Bible is assumed to be true unless someone has good reason to doubt the integrity of the text *qua* text. However the doctrine of limited inerrancy, which asserts aboriginal textual errors in historical or scientific matters, elicits corrosive doubt about the *truth of God's word*, such that its statements cannot be fully trusted until verified or cleared of error by some final, outside authority. To put matters another way, the difference between those who maintain original inerrancy and those who hold to limited inerrancy is indicated in the divergent outcomes of textual criticism for the two. When the proper text has been identified by someone holding to original inerrancy, he has found an incontestable truth. However, someone holding to limited inerrancy who identifies the original text has simply found something that is possibly true but possibly false.¹⁰³

We have seen, then, that the doctrine of restricting inerrancy to the biblical autographa is far from trivial or irrelevant. It has tremendous importance, not because inerrancy is necessary for God to use and the reader to profit from a copy of Scripture, but in order to maintain the veracity of God and unchallengeable epistemological authority of our theological commitments.

THE ASSURANCE OF POSSESSING GOD'S WORD

Throughout the previous discussion we have been insisting upon and defending the restriction of inerrancy to the autographic text of the Bible. The question might now arise as to whether we actually can be sure of possessing the genuine word of God in our present copies and translations of the Bible, for after all the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is reserved for the original text and applies to the current text only to the extent that it reflects the original. How can we know that our extant copies are substantially correct transcriptions of the autographa? The answer here is twofold: from the providence of God, and from the results of textual science.

If we do not assume that God has spoken clearly and given us an adequate means of learning what He has actually said, then the entire story of the Bible and its portrayal of the plan of God for man's salvation makes no sense whatsoever. As James Orr observed, because the preservation of the text of Scripture is part of the transmission of the knowledge of God, it is reasonable to expect that God will provide for it lest the aims of His revealing himself to men be frustrated.¹⁰⁴ The providence of God superintends matters such that copies of Scripture do not become so corrupt as to become unintelligible for God's original purposes in giving the Scripture or so corrupt as to create a major falsification of His message's text.¹⁰⁵ Scripture itself promises that God's word will abide forever (Isa. 40:8; Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Luke 16:17; 1 Pet. 1:24-25), and by His providential control of all things God secures the fulfillment of such a promise. John Skilton gives a helpful response to our current question:

¹⁰³Robert Reymond, Preface to Pinnock, *Defense of Biblical Infallibility*.

¹⁰⁴Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration*, pp. 155-156.

¹⁰⁵Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* III, pp. 68-69; Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 83.

We will grant that God's care and providence, singular though they have been, have not preserved for us any of the original manuscripts either of the Old Testament or of the New Testament. We will furthermore grant that God did not keep from error those who copied the Scriptures during the long period in which the sacred text was transmitted in copies written by hand. But we must maintain that the God who gave the Scriptures, who works all things after the counsel of his will, has exercised a remarkable care over his Word, has preserved it in all ages in a state of essential purity, and has enabled it to accomplish the purpose for which he gave it. It is inconceivable that the sovereign God who was pleased to give his Word as a vital and necessary instrument in the salvation of his people would permit his Word to become completely marred in its transmission and unable to accomplish its ordained end. Rather, as surely as that he is God, we would expect to find him exercising a singular care in the preservation of his written revelation.¹⁰⁶

Faith in the consistency of God--His faithfulness to His own intention to make men wise unto salvation--guarantees the inference that He never permits the Scripture to become so corrupted that it can no longer fulfill that end adequately; we can conclude theologically, then, that the text of Scripture is always sufficiently accurate for all practical purposes to not lead us astray.¹⁰⁷ So then, if we presuppose a sovereign God, says Van Til, it is no longer a matter for great worry that the transmission of Scripture is not altogether accurate; God's providence provides for the essential accuracy of the Bible's copying.¹⁰⁸

We maintain, therefore, that the Bible which we have in our hands is fully adequate to bring us to Christ, instruct us in his doctrine, and guide us into righteous living. It is obvious that God has done His work in and through the church for centuries despite the presence of minor flaws in the extant copies of the Scripture. Consequently it is clear that the necessity of restricting inerrancy to the autographa is not of the necessity-for-effectiveness kind. "It does not follow . . . that only an errorless text can be of devotional benefit to Christians, nor do those who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture maintain such a position."¹⁰⁹ The copies we now possess

¹⁰⁶John Skilton, "The Transmission of the Scriptures," in *The Infallible Word*, rev., ed. N. B. Stonehouse and P. Woolley (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946), p. 143.

¹⁰⁷Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁰⁸Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p. 28. The critical implications of not presupposing God's sovereign control of all things are pressed in this regard by Van Til against those who would question original inerrancy: for instance, Beegle (cf. *Doctrine of Scripture*, pp. 72-91) and Brunner ("Introduction" to *Inspiration and Authority of Bible*, pp. 46ff.).

¹⁰⁹Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, p. 87.

are known to be accurate and sufficient in all matters except minor details.¹¹⁰ As the Westminster Confession of Faith goes on to say, having restricted immediate inspiration to the original text of Scripture, the ordinary vernacular Bibles in use among Christians are adequate for all of the purposes of the religious life and hope (I.8). We can usually ignore the distinction between the autographa and copies, being bold about the word of God; yet when we are engaging in very detailed study of Scripture we must reckon with the distinction and remain teachable as to a more precise text.

The adequacy of our present copies and translations does not, of course, dismiss the need for textual criticism. "The truth and power of Scripture are not annulled by the presence of a degree of textual corruption. This fact, however, does not give grounds for complacency. An imperfect text should be replaced by a superior one."¹¹¹ After all, "if holy men spoke from God, as the Christian faith claims, then it is the account of their words that will concern us, and not a series of glosses interpolated by a medieval scribe."¹¹² Out of respect for God and the uniqueness of His word, the church, as part of its stewardship of the Bible, seeks to do its best to correct the extant copies of Scripture so as to preserve the full impact of what was originally given and to be faithful in specific issues of faith and practice.¹¹³

Men have, as we said earlier, asked of what use is an inerrant original if it is totally lost from recovery? "This is the problem of textual criticism," says Harris.¹¹⁴ It is not possible in the short space afforded here to rehearse the principles, history, and results of textual criticism.¹¹⁵ However the outstanding quality of the biblical text is famous. The original text in practically every detail has been transmitted to us, so that Kenyon could say:

The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation, throughout the centuries.¹¹⁶

Textual criticism of the copies of the Scripture which we possess has brought immensely comforting results to the church of Christ. Vos concludes that "we

¹¹⁰ Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 32.

¹¹¹ Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 85; cf. Skilton, "Transmission of the Scriptures," p. 167.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹¹³ Cf. Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, p. 87; Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God*, p. 191; F. F. Bruce, "Foreword," p. 9, and Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, p. 157.

¹¹⁴ Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, p. 96.

¹¹⁵ See Skilton, "Transmission of the Scriptures;" Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, chapter 7; Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, part III for competent surveys.

¹¹⁶ Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, rev. (New York: Harper, 1940), p. 23.

possess the text of the Bible today in a form which is substantially identical with the autographs."¹¹⁷ Warfield's words bear repeating here:

On the other hand, if we compare the present state of the New Testament text with that of any other ancient writing, we must render the opposite verdict, and declare it to be marvellously correct. Such has been the care with which the New Testament has been copied,--a care which has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy words,--such has been the providence of God in preserving for His Church in each and every age a competently exact text of the Scriptures, that not only is the New Testament unrivalled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use, but also in the abundance of testimony which has come down to us for castigating its comparatively infrequent blemishes. The divergence of its current text from the autograph may shock a modern printer of modern books; its wonderful approximation to its autograph is the undisguised envy of every modern reader of ancient books.

The great mass of the New Testament, in other words, has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation; and even in the most corrupt form in which it has ever appeared, to use the oft-quoted words of Richard Bentley, "the real text of the sacred writers is competently exact; . . . nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost . . . choose as awkwardly as you will, choose the worth by design, out of the whole lump of readings." If, then, we undertake the textual criticism of the New Testament under a sense of duty, we may bring it to a conclusion under the inspiration of hope. The autographic text of the New Testament is distinctly within the reach of criticism in so immensely the greater part of the volume, that we cannot despair of restoring to ourselves and the Church of God, His Book, word for word, as He gave it by inspiration to men.¹¹⁸

Elsewhere Warfield said that those who ridicule the "lost autographs" often speak as though the Bible as given by God is lost beyond recovery and that men are now limited to texts so hopelessly corrupted that it is impossible to say what was in the autographic text. Over against this absurd and extreme view Warfield maintained that "we have the autographic text" among our copies in circulation and the restoration of the original is not impossible.¹¹⁹

The defenders of the trustworthiness of the Scriptures have constantly asserted, together, that God gave the

¹¹⁷Johannes G. Vos, "Bible," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 1, ed. Edwin Palmer (Delaware: National Foundation of Christian Education, 1964), p. 659.

¹¹⁸Warfield, *Introduction to Textual Criticism*, pp. 12-13, 14-15.

¹¹⁹Warfield, "Inerrancy of Original Autographs," pp. 583-584.

Bible as the errorless record of his will to men, and that he has, in his superabounding grace, preserved it for them to this hour--yea, and will preserve it for them to the end of time. . . . Not only *was* the inspired Word, as it came from God, without error, but . . . it remains so. . . . It is as truly heresy to affirm that the inerrant Bible has been lost to men as it is to declare that there never was an inerrant Bible.¹²⁰

The charge that God did not apparently deem the preservation of the original text important is pointless because, far from being hopelessly corrupt, our copies virtually supply us with the autographic text.¹²¹ All the ridicule that is heaped upon evangelicals about the "lost autographa" is simply vain, for we do not regard their text as lost at all! As Harris says,

To all intents and purposes we have the autographs, and thus when we say we believe in verbal inspiration of the autographs, we are not talking of something imaginary and far off but of the texts written by those inspired men and preserved for us so carefully by faithful believers of a long past age.¹²²

The doctrine of original inerrancy, then, does not deprive believers today of the word of God in an adequate form for all the purposes of God's revelation to His people. Presupposing the providence of God in the preservation of the biblical text, and noting the outstanding results of the textual criticism of the scriptures, we can have full assurance that we possess the word of God necessary for our salvation and Christian walk. Suggestions that the autographic text has been forever lost are groundless and futile as a criticism of the evangelical doctrine. The Bibles in our hands are trustworthy renditions of God's original message, adequate for all intents and purposes as copies or conveyors of God's authoritative word.

CONCLUDING CRITICISMS

We can examine three different, remaining types of direct attacks on the doctrine of restricting inerrancy to the autographic text before ending our discussion. The first alleges that the doctrine is unprovable, the second that it cannot be consistently maintained along with other evangelical doctrines and truths about the Bible, and the third that it is simply false to the teaching of Scripture itself.

First, there are those who would attempt to make much of the unprovable character of original inerrancy because the autographa are now gone. Since the original biblical manuscripts are not available for inspection, it is

¹²⁰Warfield, "Westminster Confession and the Original Autographs," pp. 589, 590.

¹²¹Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, pp. 56-57.

¹²²Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, p. 94.

thought that taking them to have been without error is groundless speculation. After all, nobody today has actually seen these allegedly inerrant autographa. However, this criticism misconstrues the nature and source of the doctrine of original inerrancy. This is not a doctrine derived from an empirical investigation of certain written texts; it is a theological commitment rooted in the teaching of the word of God itself. The nature of God (who is truth Himself) and the nature of the biblical books (as the very words of God) require that we view the original manuscripts which were produced under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit of truth as wholly true and without error. To the charge that the errorless autographa have not been seen we can reply that neither have errant autographa ever been seen; the view that the biblical originals contained errors is just as much divorced from direct empirical proof as the opposite attitude.¹²³ The basic question remains biblically oriented and answered. What is the nature of Scripture as it came from the very mouth of God? Evangelicals do not believe that their answer to that question is unprovable, but rather fully demonstrated from the word of God itself.

A second direct criticism of the restriction of inspiration (and thereby inerrancy) to the autographa comes from George Mavrodes,¹²⁴ who challenges evangelicals to be guided by the principle of *sola Scriptura* and still explicate a definition of 'autograph' which applies to all of the biblical books and does not deny the use of uninspired amanuenses in the production of those autographic manuscripts¹²⁵ (thus discounting the notion of a literally handwritten copy by the author);¹²⁶ moreover, the view must not arbitrarily restrict inspiration to the manuscripts produced by such amanuenses. I responded to this challenge in an article published in the same journal,¹²⁷ arguing that inspiration is not arbitrarily but rather practically restricted to the autographic text because we cannot be sure--without the actual autographa to use for comparison--that copies which are prone to error (since God has not promised inerrant copying of His word) will be strictly accurate. In saying this I understood an autograph to be the first completed, personal or approved transcription of a unique word-group composed by its author. In that sense we can see that every biblical book had an autograph, and we can accommodate the fact that amanuenses were used in their production without attributing inspiration to them--for the fact that the *finished product* is designated "God-breathed" in 2 Timothy 3:16 guarantees the inerrant copying of the amanuensis without placing him in the same category as the author who was borne along by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21). Accordingly the restriction of inspiration to the autographic text can be maintained consistently along

¹²³Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 82; Pinnock, *Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, p. 15; Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 32; Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, p. 27; Lindsell, *God's Incomparable Word* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977), p. 25.

¹²⁴George Mavrodes, "The Inspiration of Autographs," *Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. XLI, no. 1 (1969):19-29.

¹²⁵Cf. Beegle, *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 160; Smith, *Inspiration and Inerrancy*, p. 122.

¹²⁶Cf. Bruce, Foreword to *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, pp. 8-9.

¹²⁷Bahnsen, "Autographs, Amanuenses, and Restricted Inspiration," pp. 100-110.

with important theological principles (*sola Scriptura*) and obvious facts about the Bible (the use of amanuenses in its production).¹²⁸

In response to my article Sidney Chapman took another tack in criticizing the restriction of inspiration to the autographa.¹²⁹ He ends up contending for the implausible thesis that the Septuagint was inspired, arguing quite simply that since "all Scripture is inspired" (2 Tim. 3:16) and Paul treated a virtual quote from the Septuagint as "Scripture" (in Rom. 4:3), therefore the Septuagint is inspired.¹³⁰ However he falls into various logical fallacies in this argument. First, there is an obvious equivocation on the word 'Scripture' as it is found in the two different texts cited. In Romans 4:3 Paul is simply interested in the sense or meaning of the scriptural teaching in the Old Testament at Genesis 15:6; this can be conveyed by any accurate copy or translation, and in view of his audience, Paul readily utilized the available Septuagint version of the text. In 2 Timothy 3:16, however, Paul is reflecting upon the specific Scripture as it originated from God, and thus the autographa alone (or identical texts on subsequent manuscripts).¹³¹ Thus the Septuagintal reading can be called "Scripture" in virtue of its expressing the sense of the original, whereas the autographa is strictly and literally "Scripture" in itself. The fact that I can casually call my American Standard Version the "Scripture" (because I assume its essential accuracy in conveying the original) can hardly be grounds for concluding that I do not distinguish between the English translation and the Hebrew-Greek original, or do not differentiate between the autographa and copies thereof. Secondly, Chapman needs to take account of the fact that Paul does not directly state that the Septuagint or any part of it is in fact "Scripture;" he does not even mention the Septuagint as such. Moreover, Paul does not illustrate or infer that the Septuagint is "Scripture" in the same sense as 2 Timothy 3:16, for his reading is not strictly identical with the Septuagintal word-group or text. Thirdly, even if the Septuagint reading at this point were "Scripture" in the full sense (and not simply *scriptural*), one could confer the same status on *all* of the Septuagint texts only by the fallacy of composition or hasty generalization. Therefore, we must conclude that Romans 4:3 does not teach or illustrate the inspiration of the Septuagint as a version, and in that case Chapman has not presented a successful counterexample to the thesis that inspiration is restricted to the autographic text of Scripture. Chapman's second line of argument against the restriction of inspiration to the autographa states that this restriction would also have to restrict the profitableness of

¹²⁸Cf. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p. 83; Longenecker, "Ancient Amanuenses and the Pauline Epistles," p. 296; Warfield, *Limited Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), pp. 18-19.

¹²⁹Sidney Chapman, "Bahnsen on Inspiration," pp. 162-167.

¹³⁰Cf. Davis, *Debate About the Bible*, pp. 64-65. Beegle uses a similar argument from linguistic labels to conclude that the Septuagint copies in the NT age were inspired; see Payne, "Plank Bridge," p. 17.

¹³¹I argue this on pp. 102-103 of my article, but Chapman confuses the argument about the original text with another one about the original manuscripts. A rebuttal to Chapman's critique of elements of my own argument is not relevant here and can be pursued separately in an article I have submitted in response to him.

Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16b) to the autographa, in which case our present translations would not benefit us with doctrine and instruction in righteousness. However this line of thought does not take account of certain facts that (1) a present-day translation can be scriptural in its thrust as long as it conveys the original sense of God's word, (2) because the predicates 'profitable' and 'inspired' are not mutually implicatory, a present translation can be profitable because it conveys God's word and still not be an inspired text as such, and (3) the inspired and/or profitable quality of a copy or translation of the scriptures can be applied by degrees (as was explained earlier in this paper). Therefore, the fact that inspiration or inerrancy is restricted to the autographa need not deprive our present copies and translations of genuine profits to us in our Christian experience.

By way of summary, the present study has maintained, while the Bible teaches its own inerrancy, the inscripturation and copying of God's word requires us to identify the specific and proper object of inerrancy as the text of the original autographa. This time-honored, common-sensical view of evangelicals has been criticized and ridiculed since the days of the modernist controversy over Scripture. Nevertheless, according to the attitude of the biblical writers, who could and did distinguish copies from the autographa, present copies of the Bible could serve the purposes of revelation and function with authority only because they were assumed to be tethered to the autographic text and its criteriological authority. The evangelical doctrine pertains to the autographic text, not the autographic codex, and maintains that present copies and translations are inerrant to the extent that they accurately reflect the biblical originals; thus the inspiration and inerrancy of present Bibles is not an all-or-nothing matter. Evangelicals maintain the doctrine of original inerrancy, not as an apologetical artifice, but on theological grounds: (1) the inspiration of copyists and the perfect transmission of Scripture have not been promised by God, and (2) the extraordinary quality of God's revealed word must be guarded against arbitrary alteration. The importance of original inerrancy is not that God cannot accomplish His purpose except through a completely errorless text, but that without it we cannot consistently confess the veracity of God, be fully assured of the scriptural promise of salvation, or maintain the epistemological authority and theological axiom of *sola Scriptura* (for errors in the original, unlike those in transmission, would not be correctable in principle). We can be assured that we possess the word of God in our present Bibles because of God's providence; He does not allow His aims in revealing Himself to be frustrated. Indeed, the results of textual criticism confirm that we possess a biblical text that is substantially identical with the autographa. Finally, contrary to recent criticisms, the doctrine of original inerrancy (or inspiration) is not unprovable, is not undermined by the use of amanuenses by the biblical writers, and is not contravened by the New Testament use of the Septuagint as "Scripture." Therefore, the evangelical restriction of inerrancy to the original autographa is warranted, important, and defensible; further, it does not jeopardize the adequacy and authority of our present Bibles. Accordingly the doctrine of original inerrancy can be commended to all believers who are sensitive to the authority of the Bible as the very word of God and who wish to propagate it as such today.

THE ADEQUACY OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

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PAPER SUMMARY

Present-day skepticism about the capacity of human language to convey truth about God springs from four sources at least: (1) our sense of the inadequacy of language to communicate even between human beings; (2) positivistic skepticism as to whether words ever refer to, or make statements about, transcendent realities; (3) the assumption in much modern Protestant hermeneutics that the content of the communication between God and man which takes place through the Scriptures is non-verbal and non-informative; (4) the influence of Eastern ideas of what constitutes a "religious" state of mind, in which one is open to the divine.

But the biblical writers purport to pass on truths about God, and in semantic terms the concepts of *analogy*, *model*, *image*, and *parable*, as characterizations of the Bible's theological language, show how this could be a true claim on their part. Biblical language will in that case be vindicated as adequate, not indeed for exhaustive knowledge of God such as he has of himself, but for authoritative guidance in living. Now this is exactly what the doctrine of verbal inspiration is affirming, for inspiration, biblically conceived, means that God has condescended to identify with what his messengers said and wrote:

to identify so completely that their words and message are also and equally his, not only, therefore, their witness to him, but also his own witness to himself. And the theological concept of inerrancy, which must be seen as belonging to the larger doctrine of God's communicative action, has its significance, in part at least, as a pointer to the completeness of this identification. For what is truly God's testimony must truly be true.

The question whether Bible language is adequate to give us knowledge of God by description and hence by acquaintance is parallel with the question whether the words, works, and personal impact of the biblical Christ, who is the Christ of history, are adequate for that purpose. Indeed, the two questions reduce to one, for Christ is the focal theme of Scripture, and Christ and the Bible attest to each other. Both share the same quality of historical particularity as means of God's self-revelation, and both embody the same divine humility in saving self-disclosure which Paul calls "weakness" and "foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:25). And where acknowledgment of Scripture as adequate verbal communication from God is lacking, acknowledgment of the biblical Christ as adequately bringing us to God is likely to be lacking too.

COMMUNICATION AND CONDESCENSION
SOME REFLECTIONS ON VERBAL INSPIRATION AND THE ADEQUACY OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

J. I. Packer

Can human language--specifically, the language of the Bible--be divine language also, God's own verbal utterance, whereby he gives us factual information about himself? Can words of men really be words of God, conveying to us the word--that is, the message--of God? Historically, the Christian answer has been "yes," and the common inclination among today's professed believers to say "no" appears as, to say the least, an eccentricity. When we ask the reasons for this shift, it appears as something of an aberration, a clear case of failure to think straight. It is worth showing this in some detail as we begin.

GOD'S WORD SPOKEN, WRITTEN, AND UNDERSTOOD

First: if, as the Nicene Creed and the New Testament writers say, the Holy Spirit "spoke by the prophets,"¹ and if the Galilean rabbi Jesus, the teacher who, though more than a prophet, was not less than a prophet (cf. Luke 13:33), was God incarnate, so that his teaching (given him by his Father,² but at the same time set forth on his own authority³) was in the most direct and obvious sense speech, teaching, witness, and instruction from God, then the question whether God uses human language in order to tell men things is in principle settled. He does. The phenomena of prophecy and incarnation prove this decisively.

Second: the concept of biblical inspiration is essentially identical with that of prophetic inspiration. No new difficulty arises in acknowledging the former if one acknowledges the latter, for no new element is involved. God's statement to Jeremiah (1:9), "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth," gives the theological paradigm of what is involved: God causes his message to enter into a man's mind, by psychological processes which in part are opaque to us, so that the man may then faithfully relay the message to others. That inspiration could, and did, take different psychological forms from one man to another, and for the same man at different times, is evident. The *dualistic* inspiration of prophets and seers produced in them a sustained awareness of the distinction between their own thoughts and the visions and specific messages that God gave them. This is psychologically different from the state of mind resulting from the *didactic* inspiration of historians, wisdom teachers, and New Testament apostles, for whom the effect of inspiration was that after observation, research, reflection, and prayer they knew just what

¹See Acts 28:25; Heb. 3:7; 10:15.

²See John 7:16ff.; 8:26-28, 38-47; 12:48-50.

³See Matt. 7:28ff.; 24:35.

they should say in God's name, as witnesses and interpreters of his work. Also, it is psychologically different from the *lyric* inspiration of the poets who wrote the Psalms and the Song in responsive celebration of what they had come to know of his goodness in creation, providence, and redemption. Subjectively, as all versifiers and hymn-writers know, the experience of a poem "coming on" (cf. Pss. 45:1; 39:3), gradually taking form in consciousness, differs from both the sense that an oracle has come and from the sense of didactic certainty. But--and this is the point to note--in the Bible writers' view, which almost all the Church held from apostolic days until quite recently, the theological reality of inspiration is the same in each case. God so controlled the process of communication to and through his servants that, in the last analysis, he is the source and speaker not merely of biblical prophecy but also of biblical history, wisdom and doctrine, and of the poems, whose giant-size delineations of adoration and devotion set worshippers of every age a standard of what their own praise and prayer should be.

For it makes no difference to inspiration (how could it?) whether its product is oral or written. Jeremiah's oracles when written were still "the words of the Lord" (Jer. 36:6, 8, 11) as well as being "the words of Jeremiah" (vs. 10). Paul, having claimed to enunciate what the Spirit had revealed "in words . . . taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13), tells his readers that they "should acknowledge that what I am *writing* to you" (the immediate reference is to his set of directions about worship and the silence of women) is a command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37)--by which he means, not that he is quoting what Jesus said on earth, as he did in 7:10ff., but that he as an apostle is actually speaking, here as elsewhere, in Jesus' name and under the power of inspiration. Whether spoken *viva voce* or written, and whether dualistic, didactic or lyric in its psychological mode, inspiration, that divine combination of prompting and control which secures precise communication of God's mind by God's messenger, remains theologically the same thing. Of Scripture in particular we must say that while it is the product of powerful religious experiences and has most inspiring effects, to call it *inspired* is directly to affirm neither of these things. *Inspired* is intended to represent the Greek adjective *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16, a word which means not, as the lexicons of Cremer and Bauer have said (and Barth after them⁴), "breathing out God," but, as Warfield proved long ago,⁵ "breathed out by God," a product of his creative power, and so an authentic disclosure of his mind and presentation of his message.

⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 504. Barth glosses *theopneustos* as meaning "given and filled and ruled by the Spirit of God, and actively outbreathing and spreading abroad and making known the Spirit of God." This combination of passive and active meanings may well be expressing truth, but the word *theopneustos* signifies only the former, not the latter.

⁵B. B. Warfield, "God-inspired Scripture," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 245ff.

Third: it is clear, first, that our Lord and the apostles saw both their Bible (our Old Testament) and their own teaching as divinely authoritative for faith and life; second, that they saw their own teaching as complementary and subordinate to that of their Bible, and indeed as expository of it; third, that they believed that both their Bible and their own teaching gave factual information about God. Thus they bequeathed to the Church, in effect, the idea of the two Testaments, Old and New together, as constituting a *canon*, that is, a rule of belief and behavior, for all of God's people at all times. The idea of Scripture as a canon in this sense is made explicit by the dominical and apostolic attitude to the Old Testament. Indeed, Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and (therefore) profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," is an analysis of the meaning of canonicity in precise terms.⁶

The witness of our Lord to the canonical status of his Bible is especially striking. In the gospels we find him affirming the divine authority of teaching given in both the indicative and the imperative moods in many Old Testament passages, as for example when in Matthew 19:4ff. he quotes Genesis 2:24 as the word of the Creator (because, presumably, it is a scriptural statement, for in context it is not an utterance of God) and deduces from it the impropriety of divorce.⁷ Moreover, we find Jesus declaring, categorically and comprehensively, that his ministry would be entirely misunderstood were it thought that he came to cancel or set aside the law and the prophets, i.e. the Old Testament; on the contrary, he had come to fulfill both. And clearly, for him to let them shape his life and teaching (which is what "fulfill" implies) was an acknowledgment of their authority over him. How complete that acknowledgment was appears from the temptation story, where Jesus three times embraces the God-prescribed way against Satan's alternative suggestions, and from the passion story, where we see him going up to Jerusalem to die because this was predicted as Messiah's destiny, and Scripture must be fulfilled.⁸ That Jesus, being God in person, taught with divine authority, and that his teaching constitutes a rule for his disciples, is a Christian commonplace (cf. Matt. 7:21-29; 28:19; etc.); only by following Jesus' teaching can one be his disciple. But part of his teaching is a view of our Old Testament as canonical both for him and for his followers, plus a good deal of exposition of it that derives factual information about God from it. What sort of disciples are we if we decline to receive this basic strand of our master's teaching?

⁶If, as is grammatically possible though somewhat more harsh linguistically and less appropriate contextually, the first words of the verse be rendered, "All Scripture Inspired by God is also profitable . . ." the point remains unaffected. It is inspiration (= inspiredness) as such which constitutes the ground of canonicity. On the translation, see the judicious remarks of Donald Guthrie, *ad loc.* (*The Pastoral Epistles*, London: Tyndale Press, and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957, pp. 163ff.).

⁷The expedient of the New English Bible, which renders the first words of Matthew 19:5 "And he (Jesus) said," is not the most natural way of punctuating and translating.

⁸On prophecy and the passion, see Mark 8:31-33; 9:31; 10:33; 12:10ff.; 14:21; Matt. 26:52-54; Luke 9:31; 18:31-33; 22:37; etc.

Of the New Testament canon it need only be said that (1) apostolic witness to Christ, being Spirit-inspired, was always meant to function, in conjunction with the Old Testament, as a rule of faith;⁹ (2) the only problem, therefore, at any stage was to identify the documents in which genuine apostolic instruction was given, either by apostles in person or by their immediate and accredited associates (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2); (3) we have no good reason to question the 27 books which the early church identified as apostolic in the required sense, for their external credentials are impressive, their doctrine is homogeneous,¹⁰ and Christians of all generations have found in them that unique, transforming light and power which are the hallmarks of divinity upon the biblical canon as a whole, evidencing it to be God's word and thereby setting it apart from all other writings that the world has seen.

Fourth: it is true that the biblical revelation takes the form of an interpretive record of God's will, works, and ways as these were disclosed in a series of episodes in which God dealt with men of the ancient Near East. It is true, therefore, that what this record gives us is universally valid truths as applied to particular Near Eastern folk of the far-off past, up to the first century A.D., and needing to be reapplied to us today. But since these universal truths are intrinsically clear and rational, such reapplication is always a practical possibility. To reapply biblical principles to ourselves, having discerned through historical exegesis what the human author meant his contemporaries to gather from what he said, and having distinguished between principle and application within his message, is the essential and continuing task of biblical interpretation. Historical exegesis is only the preliminary part of interpretation; application is its essence, and exegesis without application should not be called *interpretation* at all. The fear sometimes felt, that because of the distance between the cultures and outlooks of the biblical period and our own these ancient Near Eastern documents cannot communicate to us God's mind and will for our lives in our own day, is groundless. God is rational and unchanging, and all men in every generation, being made in God's image, are capable of being addressed by him. Within every culture in every age, it is possible through overhearing God's words of instruction to men of long ago to hear God speaking to ourselves, as the Holy Spirit causes God's words of long ago to reapply themselves in our own minds and consciences. The proof that this is possible is that it actually happens. No proof can be more compelling than that!

⁹See Rom. 16:25ff.; 1 Cor. 2:1-36; 14:37 (cf. 7:40, where "I think" expresses not doubt but ironical challenge--"I, too, think I have God's Spirit--don't you agree that I have?"); 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13; 4:1ff., 15; 2 Thess. 3:4, 6, 10-14; 1 John 1:1-5; 4:1-6; etc.

¹⁰It is fashionable today to stress the linguistic diversity of the New Testament documents rather than the substantial oneness of their teaching (cf. e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1977); however, the latter point has often been established (cf. e.g., A. M. Hunter, *The Unity of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1944).

PRESENT-DAY DOUBTS ABOUT LANGUAGE

It is clear, however, that some today find difficulty with the line of thought we have set out because their minds are already possessed by deep-rooted uncertainties about the power of human language to convey information (as distinct from evoking attitudes) in the realm of what philosophers might call the super-sensible or transcendent, and Christians would call the divine. Until these doubts are exorcised, straightforward belief that in the Bible God tells us things will seem naive and hazardous, and the temptation will be to follow the example of liberal and radical Protestant thinkers from Schleiermacher to Bultmann, Tillich and their latter-day disciples, and turn the flank of the above exposition by agreeing that it states the Bible's own view, but then treating it as a culturally-conditioned myth which for us can only function as a symbol of something else, namely non-verbal pressure which God exerts on the human spirit by evoking experiences of mystical, emotional, and ethical insight. So we need to take the measure of this fashionable skepticism about religious and, in particular, biblical language. It appears to draw its strength from four features of today's cultural landscape.

Its first source is *a widespread sense of the inadequacy of language as a means of personal communication*. This attitude, which finds vivid expression in poets like Stein, in novelists like Kafka, and in playwrights like Beckett, appears to be a symptom of that pervasive failure of nerve from which Western culture has conspicuously suffered in this century. Whereas writers from Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton to Hopkins, Housman, and Hardy had celebrated and explored the resourcefulness of language as a means of communication at all levels, their successors show themselves burdened and oppressed at the isolation of each individual and the inadequacy of all one's words to make known to others what is really going on in one's innermost life. Ludwig Wittgenstein was very much a modern man when he laid it down that what can be said can be said clearly, that what we cannot say clearly we had best not try to say at all, and that the existential questions which matter to us most (*unsere Lebensprobleme*) are inexpressible.¹¹ T. S. Eliot was voicing what many feel when he wrote in *Four Quartets* (Burnt Norton V) that in personal communication,

Words strain,
Crash and sometimes break under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.

Moods do not always express either great insight or strong logic, but they are potent things while they last, and undoubtedly the modern mood is one of deep skepticism as to whether words can ever articulate the realities of personal existence and convey to others what is in the depth of one's own heart. And if this is true (so it is felt) between us who share a common human nature, surely it will be much more true when God, who is so different from us, is the communicator. Flashes of insight and illumination about

¹¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. C. K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), pp. 27, 186-189.

ourselves he can give us, no doubt, but precise information about his own will and purpose, his own thoughts and outlook?--surely not. Our post-Christian monotheistic paganism which disbelieves the incarnation and stresses God's remoteness serves merely to reinforce this mood, and unless and until true faith in Christ revives in Western culture, belief that God in Scripture specifically tells us things about himself is likely to go on being felt to be crude, unsophisticated, and naive.

The second source of skepticism is *a widespread doubt as to whether language can refer to transcendent realities at all*. At presuppositional level, this doubt runs through much of the intensive study of language on which philosophers (mostly empiricists) and exponents of linguistics (a new academic discipline, developed mainly as a department of sociology) have been engaged for over half a century. While it is clear that the doubt was brought to this study rather than derived from it, it has so shaped professional procedures and techniques that to casual observers linguistic philosophy and semantic theory, with their stress on defining things by pointing to them, seem actually to confirm the doubt. Logically, this is nonsense, just as the idea that naturalistic natural science can confirm its own uniformitarian presuppositions is nonsense, but there is no denying that it is potent nonsense just at present.

The fountain-heads of linguistic philosophy were Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) and Alfred J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1935). Wittgenstein's book was deeply skeptical, and Ayer's reflected the positivist views of Rudolf Carnap's "Vienna Circle," whose members held that all facts are public and observable and therefore the ideal universal language is that of physics. Wittgenstein moved on to acknowledge a multiplicity of universes of discourse ("language-games"), and Ayer's tract went down to history as logical positivism's last manifesto as well as its first; but interest in the logic of language, "syntactics" as it is sometimes called, remains, and with it the convention, basic in both books mentioned, of treating as eccentric any view which holds that language can connote, denote, and give information about anything that transcends the world of the senses. The study of semantics, that is, of the way language works as a means of expression and communication, stems from Ferdinand de Saussure's sociologically oriented pioneer work, *A Course in General Linguistics* (English translation, 1960; French original, 1915), and has tended to operate throughout in terms of a similar convention. The convention is arbitrary enough, but while it exists among the learned it cannot but create a climate of opinion in its own favor among those who as students seek to benefit from the professionals' expertise. Students naturally soak up what their teachers take for granted.

The third source of skepticism is *the widespread unwillingness of Christian teachers to allow that in and through the teaching of Scripture God is informing us about himself*. Since liberalism took hold a century and a half ago, Protestant theologians, while remaining sure that Scripture mediates conscious, life-giving contact with God, have for the most part been equally sure that Scripture is not his Word in the sense expressed by Augustine's "what thy Scripture says, thou dost say." Kant, whose deism controlled his

philosophy in a rather obvious way, had denied both the possibility and the need of verbal revelation from God, and the liberal theologians took their cue from him. Their thought from the start was that Scripture is a product of religious and moral insight, which triggers off similar insight in those who are capable of it, but that the actual theology of the Bible writers is no more than culture-bound human witness to these awarenesses of God, awarenesses which in any case were essentially ineffable, as all religious experiences are. Schleiermacher, with his belief that the essence of all religion is an intuition (feeling) of dependence on God, and that Christianity is distinctive only because in it this feeling was and is mediated through the impact of the historical figure of Jesus, is the archetypal liberal teacher, and was in fact the fountain-head of this whole development. Ritschl is usually thought of as a liberal patriarch because he denied verbal revelation and miracles and was deeply agnostic about God, but his hostility to mysticism was uncharacteristic of the movement generally. In this century, neo-orthodoxy has stressed that through the Bible God's Word comes to us, but has declined to conceive of that Word as simply Bible teaching applied to our situation. On the right wing, Barth viewed the Word as a breaking forth of something which Scripture "intends" and which the church needs to hear, rather than as a systematic and integrated application to us of what Scripture actually says. At the centre, Brunner spent much time urging that since God's revelation of himself is personal it cannot be in any sense propositional--a curious false antithesis which makes God's method of self-disclosure analogous to the non-verbal communication of Harpo Marx. On the left wing, Bultmann insisted that our life-transforming encounter with the Word of God yields no factual information whatever, and that the nature of true faith is to trust God knowing that, in the strict sense, one knows nothing about him at all. The practitioners of the "new hermeneutic" follow Bultmann in exploring the nature of "language-events" which alter our self-understanding without bringing us any direct understanding of God.

When leaders of theology thus decline to treat any of the statements of our thousand-plus-page, million-and-a-half word Bible as information from God to us, and trumpet abroad that there can be no such thing as God-given information, and that it is an intellectualist mistake to look for any, it is no wonder if folk lose faith in the capacity of biblical speech to tell us facts about our Maker. Were we all clear-headedly logical, we should see ourselves as called by this situation to choose between such modern theologians as those mentioned and such older theologians as Moses and the prophets, Jesus Christ, Peter, Paul, John, and the author of Hebrews, and seeing the issue that way we might resolve that on this point at least we should ditch the moderns. But because many people are muddle-headedly conventional, it is not always realized that this is the choice which faces us, nor, where it is realized, is the right decision always made.

The fourth source of skepticism is *the widespread influence of Eastern religious ideas, all stressing that God is inexpressible by man*. Thus, for example, Lao-Tse begins his treatise by saying: "The *tao* that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging *tao*. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name." "In Lao-Tse and in eastern mysticism generally," comments John Macquarrie, "the thought seems to be . . . of a

primal undifferentiated Being, which we cannot even name without giving it a determinate character, and so making it some particular thing,"¹² which in Eastern thinking, as in the Neoplatonism which circled like smog round early Christianity, the ultimate Being is not. Christians believe that God made man in his own image so that God and man might talk together, and furthermore that Jesus is God incarnate, come to us to show us what God eternally is; so this particular transcendentalist hang-up does not touch them. Eastern faiths, however, lacking these beliefs, and leaning as they do to either pantheistic or deistic conceptions (examples: Hinduism in the former case, Islam in the latter) can hardly avoid it. To Westerners for whom Christianity is old hat and Eastern religion is a novelty, and who, like the Athenians, are always going for new things, the thought of God as wholly remote from the categories of human language may seem, like Tennyson's white-clothed arm which grasped Excalibur, "mystic, wonderful;" Christians, however, will see it as an embracing of darkness as against light. But the Eastern notion of God as wholly inconceivable and inexpressible certainly infects many minds today, and reinforces the common skeptical reaction when Christians make their claim that God has used human language--Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, to be precise--to give us specific information about himself.

OUR LANGUAGE-USING GOD

Such skepticism, however, is as far from the world of biblical religion as it is from the historic faith of the church. As we have already seen, Christianity has from the start been based on the biblical conviction that in and through words spoken to and by prophets, apostles, and supremely Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, as well as by the voice heard from heaven (Mark 1:11; 9:7; John 12:28ff.; 2 Pet. 1:17ff.), God has spoken, in the precise sense of using language to tell men things. To assume, with the liberals, that the biblical vocabulary of divine speech is metaphorical in the sense of signifying non-verbal communication, or the spontaneous discernment by sensitive souls of spiritual values, is incorrect. We may take the very explicit witness of the letter to the Hebrews as proof of this. The writer opens with the great declaration: "In many and various ways God *spoke* of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has *spoken* to us by a Son" (Heb. 1:1ff.). The phrase "many and various ways" recalls the visions, dreams, theophanies, angelic messages, and other forms of direct locution whereby God revealed his mind to his Old Testament messengers, as well as indicating the occasional and fragmentary nature of the revelations themselves, at least when seen in the light of the final and definitive self-disclosure which God gave through his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. But when the writer says that God *spoke* through his Son, what he has in mind is precisely verbal communication, just as he has when he says that God *spoke* through the prophets; for his argument continues with the inference that because of the Son's supreme dignity we must pay all the greater attention to the message of the great salvation which he declared, and which his first hearers, the apostles, had relayed in their spoken testimony (Heb. 2:1-3). And the author proceeds to make, or at least to buttress, every positive theological point in his whole

¹² John Macquarrie, *God-Talk* (London: SCM Press and New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 23ff.

exposition, up to the final chapter of the letter, by exposition and application of Old Testament passages, which he cites as what God, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, says to Christian believers (see 1:5-13, 5:5ff., 8:3-12, 10:30, 37ff., 12:26, 13:5 for God as speaker; 2:11-13, 10:5-9 for Christ as speaker; 3:7-11, 9:8, 10:15-17 for the Holy Spirit as speaker). We cannot here go into the fascinating question of the principles on which he interprets the meaning of these passages; our present concern is simply with his conviction that the words of his Bible (our Old Testament), along with those of Christ and the apostles, express both what God *said* on the public stage of the space-time continuum which we call world history, and also what he *says* now, in personal application to all to whom the message comes, and in a way that is decisive for their eternal destiny. This is the characteristic biblical conviction, found not only in Hebrews but wherever in Scripture the words of the law, or the prophets, or the apostles, or the Lord Jesus Christ are mentioned. It is this conviction that we must now examine.

As we have already seen, it is a conviction about *authority*: that is, about God's way of exerting his rightful claim to direct his rational human creatures into acknowledgment of his truth and obedience to his will. As such, it is a conviction about both the reality of communication from God to us, whereby he tells us what otherwise we could not have known, and also about God's gracious plan to make us sinners his friends, which is the end to which the knowledge he gives us is meant to lead. Formally, the conviction is made up of these three strands: (1) God's word of direct self-disclosure to individuals in history--Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jonah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, and others--were directly authoritative for their own belief and behavior: God having spoken to them, they were bound to believe what he had told them, knowing it to be true (because he is a God of truth), and bound also to do all that God had told them to do. (2) The same direct divine authority attached to all that God prompted his chosen spokesmen--prophets, apostles, wisdom writers, poets, and Jesus Christ himself--to declare to others in his name. Their authority was not just that of deep human religious insight, deep though their religious insight was; primarily and fundamentally, their authority was that of the God whose truth they were relaying in the verbal form to which he himself had led them. Paul declares that "we (apostles) have received . . . the Spirit . . . from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words . . . taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:12ff.). Verbal inspiration, as here defined, conferred this direct divine authority upon the words which God's messengers spoke, the authority which required their hearers to receive what they heard as from God himself. (3) The same divine authority belongs to what they wrote, in the books that now constitute our canonical Scriptures.

As our God-inspired canon, the rule for faith and life, Holy Scripture may properly be called *law* (understanding that word in the sense of the Hebrew *torah*, which signifies the kind of authoritative instruction which a father gives to his children). But this statement must not be taken to imply that all Scripture has the uniform linguistic quality of civil statutes, or lawyers' textbooks, or that it all consists of simple factual assertions (propositions) with appended commands of a single logical type. The uses of language in the Bible are at least as varied as one would find in any 66 other books, and it is important to do justice to their complexity.

In ordinary communication, language appears to have five main functions at least. First, it is *informative*, conveying factual data of one sort or another which the persons addressed are assumed not to know. Second, it is *imperative*, communicating commands and calling for action. Third, it is *illuminative*, using various devices to stir our imaginations into empathetic activity and so deepen our insight into, and understanding of, facts which at conceptual level we know already. Thus, poems about nature--sunny days, snow, rain, flowers, trees, and so on--are offered, not as versified meteorology or botany, but as transmitting the poet's vision of the significance of these familiar things. The analogies, metaphors, and parables with which we pepper our prose are meant to be illuminative in a similar way. Fourth, language is *performative*, actually bringing about states of affairs by announcing them to be the case. By saying, "I declare this road open," the mayor actually opens the new highway; by writing, "His name is John," Zacharias actually settled what his son should be called (Luke 1:63). Fifth, language is *celebratory*, focusing on shared apprehension of things in a way which confirms that it is shared and so binds together more closely those who share it. Much ritual and ceremonial language, many speeches in many contexts, and all such utterances in company as "Isn't this lovely?" or "Look at that!" or even "Wow!" come in this category. Now, God's instruction given to sinful men as we find it set before us in Holy Scripture involves all these uses of language, thus:

Informative language is basic, for every book of Scripture, in its own way, is didactic, making affirmations, implicit if not explicit, about God. This is true even of Esther, which celebrates God's providence even though it does not mention his name, and also of the Song, which is a love duet celebrating in parable form the mutual devotion and affection of the Lord and his people. He who, in face of this, is still resolved to deny that revelation is informative--that is, to use the word fashionable since the forties, "propositional"--ought logically, therefore, to deny outright that Holy Scripture is in any sense revelation: which view, being a departure from dominical and apostolic teaching, has no claim to be taken seriously. What believing Christians should hold, rather, is this: that every assertion which the Bible, soundly exegeted, proves to be making, whether about matters of natural and historical fact within the created order or about the Creator's own plans and actions, should be received as information given and taught by God as part of that total presentation, interpretation, and celebration of redemption which Scripture essentially is.

Imperative language is equally basic, for the Mosaic law, the wisdom literature, the moral teaching of the prophets, of Christ, and of the apostles, and abundance of particular narratives set forth God's commands: "You shall . . . you shall not . . ." (Exod. 20:3-17); "Do not . . ." (Matt. 5:34, 36, 39, 42; 6:3, 7ff., 16, 19, 25, 31, 34; 7:6, etc.); "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37); "Watch" (Mark 13:33-37); and so on. This point needs no further illustration.

Illuminative language appears when analogy, allegory, image, and parable are used by God's spokesmen to help folk grasp imaginatively and existentially, sometimes through traumatic self-judgment, the deep significance for them of events in their lives, and in particular how these events bear on their

relationship with God. New facts are not being communicated, but listeners are being nudged into seeing old facts in a new light. Examples are Jotham's secular parable of the trees, spoken to the men of Shechem (Judg. 9:7ff.); Nathan's parable of the ewe-lamb, directed to David (2 Sam. 12:1ff.); Ezekiel's allegories of the two eagles and the two sisters (Ezek. 17:23); and the parables of Jesus, whereby he sought to startle his popular, prejudiced, uncommitted audience into grasping the revolutionary realities of his gospel of the kingdom. Jesus' parables "work" by vividly invoking everyday realities, sometimes with a built-in surprise (as in the stories of the laborers in the vineyard, and the great supper, and the pharisee and the publican), sometimes not (as in the stories of the sower, the mustard-seed, and the lost sheep), but always in a way that challenges the hearer to face with all seriousness God's ways in relation to him personally, and to examine his own response to God, in the matter of the kingdom. In other words (to use once more the language of an earlier generation), these parables have less to do with teaching doctrine than with applying doctrine already taught; they are an imaginative device for making folk see the personal bearing of what conceptually they knew about before.

Performative language appears also, as when God, having told Abraham that he will make his covenant with him, proceeds to say, "My covenant is with you" (Gen. 17:2-4). The use of these words causes the state of affairs spoken of to exist.

Celebratory language is found in the Psalms, Exodus 15, and similar passages, where the known facts of God's work in his people's history are turned into themes for gratitude and praise.

When biblical inspiration is said to be *plenary* as opposed to partial, and *verbal* as opposed to the idea that God gave inklings and insights only without determining in what words they should be expressed, this does not imply a Koranic view of inspiration, whereby translations of the original are precisely not the Holy Book. As Reformation theology used to say, it is the sense of Scripture that is Scripture, and all translations are in truth the Bible, at least to the extent that they are accurate. Nor do these adjectives imply, as they are persistently thought to do, that because biblical words are God's words we may lawfully seek or find in Scripture meanings unrelated to what the human writers were conveying to those whom they were addressing. The Bible is as fully human as it is divine, and the way to get into the present mind of God the Holy Spirit is by getting into the expressed mind of his human agents, the biblical authors, God's penmen, and making appropriate application to ourselves of what they tell us. Allegorizing, and everything like it, is illegitimate. The only point which *plenary* and *verbal* are making is that the biblical words themselves, Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek, are to be seen as God-given. Men were not left to articulate information about, and interpretations of, God's ways with men apart from God's superintending providence. On the contrary, the Lord who gave the Word also gave the words. It was not just the writers' thinking but "all scripture," the written product as such, that was inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. 2 Pet. 1:21).

Therefore, it is critically important that, so far as possible, we make certain that we know what the God-given words are. Words, after all, are

the vehicles and guardians of meaning; if we lose the words, we shall have lost the sense too. So the science of textual ("lower") criticism becomes a matter of key significance. When (for instance) the Basis of Faith of the British Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now the Universities' and Colleges' Christian Fellowship) ascribes inspiration and authority to Holy Scripture *as originally given*, the point of this phrase is not, as is sometimes thought, to give unrestricted license for suspecting textual corruption whenever problems of apparent discrepancy between different passages arises, but simply to make clear that mistranslations and demonstrable copyists' slips in the manuscript tradition are not to be revered as God's truth, but are rather to be detected and amended. It has often been said, and rightly, that not one word in a thousand in the Greek text of the New Testament is open to serious doubt, and that there is no place at all in either Testament where uncertainty about the text raises a question of doctrinal substance. Also, it is often said, and surely rightly again, that no honest translation of the Bible has ever been so bad that God's life-giving message could not reach men through it. Nonetheless, human mistakes in translation and transmission can only obscure the divine word, and therefore we ought to try to weed them out, just as proof-readers ought to try to weed out all misprints, although what is printed would be moderately intelligible even with the misprints there.

However, in thus stressing the importance of the particular words which the human authors, and through them God the Spirit, gave us, we must not forget that the semantic units--units of meaning, that is--in the Bible, as in all other literature, are sentences, paragraphs, and ultimately whole books, as such. It is always wrong to think of interpreting any document as a process of combining all the potential meaning or meanings of each individual word, as the dictionaries define it; it is doubly wrong when in interpreting Scripture we assume that each word which we think theologically significant will always have the same acreage of meaning, and then define that meaning by reference to the way other biblical authors use the word elsewhere. The monumental mistake of Luther, who took for granted that James must mean by "justify," "works," and "faith" what Paul meant by these words, and on this basis wished to see James dropped from the canon because James 2:14-26 seemed to contradict Romans and Galatians, stands as a warning for all time as to the danger of this false method. The ambiguous and easily misused dictum that the Bible should be read like any other book is true at least in this sense, that the ordinary rules of semantics must be recognized as applying to it, and any interpretative technique which violates them must be ruled out.¹³ Docetic interpretations of Scripture (interpretations, that is, which query the reality of the apparent humanness) are as objectionable as are docetic understandings--misunderstandings, rather--of the personal experience of the incarnate Lord.

¹³For more on this, see A. C. Thiselton, "Understanding God's Word Today" in *Obedying Christ in a Changing World, I: The Lord Christ*, ed. John Stott (London: Collins, 1977), pp. 90-122; "Semantics and the New Testament Interpretation" in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 75-104; James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

THE PROBLEM OF THEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE

We should now take notice that the position spelled out in the foregoing paragraphs--a position learned, as we believe, from the Bible itself--solves in principle two of the knottiest problems in current philosophy of religion; namely, how theological language can have any definite meaning, and how in particular it can be a means of revelation, in the sense of communicating true information about God.

During the past half-century, linguistic philosophers have frequently tried to show on various logical grounds that language cannot possibly carry knowledge about God. Answers to them have been given, with some success, in terms of the philosophers' own assumption that our language is an evolutionary development, for which references to the objects of physical sense-experience is, if not exclusive, at least primary. Thus, Ian Ramsey has shown how, by attaching well-chosen "qualifiers" to verbal "models" ("heavenly" to "Father," for instance), we can so "stretch" language as to direct men's minds to a transcendent object of reference, and thereby under God precipitate a "disclosure" to them of its reality.¹⁴ John Macquarrie has analyzed theological language ("God-talk" as he calls it) as stemming from reflection on existentially significant encounters with Holy Being.¹⁵ Austin Farrer has displayed biblical language as "working" in the manner of poetic imagery.¹⁶ Eric Mascall, among others, has labored to give new life to the classical doctrine on which Thomist natural theology rests, namely that God, being One whom we resemble in some ways though not in others, can be known metaphysically through the construction of analogies.¹⁷ Basil Mitchell, Ian Crombie, and others have exhibited biblical and ecclesiastical phraseology as a combining and balancing of parables.¹⁸ Frederick Ferré, having worked his way conscientiously through various forms of skepticism and agnosticism concerning the objective reference-point of theological language, ends his argument by affirming that if, as is claimed, the personal linguistic "models" of Christian theism unify and make sense of our experience as a whole, that will decisively vindicate the claim that they are both meaningful and true to reality.¹⁹ As *ad hominem* responses to the skeptics, starting from the ground which skepticism occupies with regard to human language, these expositions have merit. But their authors fail to query the skeptical assumption that the systems of arbitrary signs, vocal and visual, which we call language are "from below," i.e., are an evolutionary development in which the signification of physical

¹⁴ Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1957); *Models and Mystery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); *Christian Discourse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

¹⁵ Macquarrie, *God-Talk*.

¹⁶ Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision* (London: Dacre Press, 1948).

¹⁷ Eric L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy* (London: Longmans, 1949); *Words and Images* (London: Longmans, 1957).

¹⁸ See their contributions to *Faith and Logic*, ed. Basil Mitchell (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957).

¹⁹ Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (London: Collins, 1970), pp. 231ff.

entities is basic to everything else. This omission leaves their job half-done, so that their apologia is only half-strength.

Lack of both space and competence make it impossible to explore here the many problems that arise concerning the origin and development of human language; but the main point is this. The opening chapters of Genesis, one *obiter dictum* (incidental comment) from which was quoted, we saw, by our Lord as the Creator's own word (Matt. 19:4ff., citing Gen. 2:24), teach us that human beings were created in God's image (1:26ff.) and proceed on the basis that both a sense of God and a language in which to converse with him were given to men as ingredients in, or perhaps preconditions of, the divine image from the start. By depicting God as the first language user (1:3, 6, etc.), Genesis shows us that human thought and speech have their counterparts and archetypes in him. By telling us of Adam, Eve, and their descendants listening and responding to God, Genesis shows us that, so far from reference to the Creator "stretching" ordinary language in an unnatural way, such "stretching" is actually language's primary use, and what is unnatural is the "shrinking" of language which the supposition that it can only talk easily and naturally of physical objects reflects. By making us aware that from the start God has used language to tell men things and so to teach them what to think about him and how to talk to him, Genesis both vindicates the language of theology and worship as meaningful and establishes God's own utterances as the standard of truth to which our theological notions must always conform.

Thus the biblical doctrine of the God who speaks and of God's image in man as involving a capacity to apprehend and respond to God's verbal address, shows up the arbitrariness and indeed provincialism of the post-Christian, positivistic theory of language on which the skepticism of linguistic philosophers rests. The final proof that human language can speak intelligibly of God is that God has actually spoken intelligibly about himself in it. This intelligibility flows from the so-called anthropomorphism (man-likeness) of his account of himself. But such anthropomorphism is really a witness to the essential theomorphism (God-likeness) of created man. The fact that God's self-disclosure, being couched linguistically in the personal terms in which we talk about ourselves, is intelligible to us does not mean that God must have misrepresented himself to us in what he has said; what it means, rather, is that in our personhood and our capacity to give and receive verbal communication, we are less unlike God than perhaps we thought.

It is the persistent conviction of latter-day Western philosophers that the difficulty of supposing that human theological language can actually refer to God and express factual truth--"true truth," as Francis Schaeffer calls it--about him springs from two sources. First, God (if real) must so differ from us that we can never be sure that any of our statements or concepts really fit him. Second, he must be assumed to be silent, not helping us to see what to say about him by saying things to us about himself. What we are meeting in those two convictions is the baleful legacy of Kant, as theologized in the Liberal tradition from Schleiermacher on. It was Kant, with his lethal combination of *a priori* deism and *a posteriori* agnosticism (for this was the ultimate epistemological issue of his critical philosophy), who put abroad the idea that no serious philosopher could believe in a God who speaks, and

that religion should be shaped up by reflection "within the bounds of pure reason," and that while God might be a necessary postulate he could not strictly be *known* in any sense, by any means, at any time, any more than could the *Ding-an-sich* (thing-in-itself) in the natural order. It was Kant who hereby bequeathed to us the now chronic misunderstanding of God's transcendence and incomprehensibility as implying that in his personal existence he is both remote from us and unintelligible to us. Some of the greatest of the moderns have been infected by this misunderstanding. "To Barth," wrote John Frame, "God's transcendence implies that he *cannot* be clearly revealed to men, clearly represented by human words and concepts." That is because Barth's thinking ran on good Kantian lines. But, notes Frame, "Scripture itself never deduces from God's transcendence the inadequacy and fallibility of all verbal revelation. Quite the contrary: in Scripture, verbal revelation is to be obeyed without question, *because* of the divine transcendence . . . God's lordship, transcendence, demands unconditional belief in and obedience to the words of revelation; it *never* relativizes or softens the authority of these words." Is this, as Barth, blinkered by his Kantianism, would urge, an idolizing of human words? No, says Frame, for the words of Scripture are no less the Word of God than they are the word of man, and divine authority is intrinsic to their message.²⁰ This is the proper correction of the Kantian mistake: Anglo-Saxon philosophers, no less than continental theologians, would do well to take note. Since God, though really transcendent, really says what Scripture says, and since man, being really theomorphic, as God's image-bearer, really does apprehend what God in Scripture says, philosophical skepticism about the capacity of language to carry truth about the true God must be dismissed as an unhappy and indeed rather ludicrous mistake.

THE CONDESCENSION OF GOD

Paul calls the divine ordaining and encompassing of the cross of Jesus Christ the *foolishness* and *weakness* of God (1 Cor. 1:25). He is being ironical, for he also sees Christ as God's wisdom and power (1 Cor. 1:24), and is here insisting that the word of the cross only appears as folly to those who have not understood it; but he is making a positive theological point as well, namely that the death of God's Son on Calvary shows how completely God, in love to mankind, was willing to hide his glory and become vulnerable to shame and dishonor. Now God in love calls men to embrace and boast of this foolish-seeming, weak-looking, disreputable event of the cross as the means of their salvation: a challenge to sinful pride of both mind and heart. Similarly (and this is our next point) God in love calls us to humble ourselves

²⁰ John Frame, "God and Biblical Language," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), pp. 173ff. It is worth underlining the point implicit in Frame's equation of transcendence with lordship. Lordship, comprising the relation of upholding, directing, and controlling all created things in both their motion and their rest, is the only concept of transcendence that Scripture yields; the Kantian-Barthian ideas of metaphysical remoteness from us, obscurity to us, and evasion of all the categories of human (God-given!!) language, are simply not there.

by bowing to Holy Scripture, which also has an appearance of foolishness and weakness when judged by human standards, yet is truly his Word and the means of our knowing him as Saviour. As God first humbled himself for our salvation in the incarnation and upon the cross, so now he humbles himself for our knowledge of salvation by addressing us in and through the often humanly unimpressive words of the Bible. We are here confronted by that quality in God of which C. S. Lewis wrote: "The same divine humility which decreed that God should become a baby at a peasant woman's breast, and later an arrested field preacher in the hands of the Roman police, decreed also that he should be preached" (and, we may add, written about) "in a vulgar, prosaic and unliterary language."²¹ For this quality in God whereby he lovingly identifies with what seems to be beneath him, the quality of which the incarnation is the paradigm though all his gracious dealings with men show it, the classical name is *condescension* (Greek, *synkatabasis*; etymological significance, "coming-down-to-be-with").

Calvin, who was perhaps over-conscious of the literary limitations of some parts of the Bible, spoke emphatically of God's condescension in deigning out of love to talk to us in earthy and homespun language "with a contemptible meanness of words" (*sub contemptibili verborum humilitate*).²² In this, as Calvin saw it, God's first aim is not so much to keep us humble, though that comes into it, as to help us understand. Thus his simple mode of speech to us, in and through the words of the largely unsophisticated writers whom he used as his human penmen, is in itself a gesture of love. "God . . . condescends (*se demittit*) to our immaturity (*ruditatem*) . . . When God prattles to us (*balbutit*) in Scripture in a clumsy, homely style (*crasse et plebeio stylo*), let us know that this is done on account of the love he bears us."²³ One sign of love to a child is adapting to the child's language when talking to him, and so, says Calvin, God in his love to us adapts to our childishness in spiritual things. So far, however, from causing obscurity, God's baby talk, what Calvin calls his "prattling," dispels it, making everything plainer to us than it could be otherwise.

Surely Calvin is right. The genuine human weaknesses and limitations which Scripture sometimes exhibits, from Paul's forgetfulness (1 Cor. 1:14ff.) and coarseness (Gal. 5:12) to the bad Greek of Revelation and the wild, pain-maddened rhetoric of Job, do in fact contribute to the communication which Scripture--that is, God in and through Scripture--effects. That communication comprises not simply doctrinal truths, but demonstrations of how divine grace works in the lives of (not paragons and plaster saints, but) all sorts of earthy, flesh-and-blood human beings. As God chose "undignified" mortals to save (even sinners like you and me!), so he was ready to become "undignified" in both incarnation and inspiration in order to bring about our salvation. The condescension of God in becoming a baby Jew and being executed on a Roman gibbet, and in now proclaiming his goodness and his gospel to us via

²¹C. S. Lewis, Introduction to J. B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches* (London: Bles, 1947),

²²Calvin, *Institutes* I.viii.1, referring to the New Testament preaching of the Kingdom.

²³Calvin, *Commentary on John*, on John 3:12.

the down-to-earth, unliterary, often rustic words of the 66 canonical books, is one and the same, and spells the same reality throughout--love to the uttermost.

But God's humility offends man's pride, and hence both incarnation and inspiration are rejected as incredible by some. It is instructive to note the parallel here. The pagan philosopher Celsus (c. 150 A.D.) led the van in ridiculing the incarnation. How could God the Son, the supposedly infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Creator become man--let alone a Jew!--and make himself known within the limitations of human finitude? Surely the idea is absurd! Scripturally-instructed Christians are content to reply that it must be possible, since God has actually done it, and that the incarnation is a wise and glorious mystery, despite its attendant weakness and shame, for from it came salvation. At the end of the eighteenth century the deist philosopher Kant, as we saw, turned away in comparable contempt from belief in inspiration, and thus pioneered a stance which has become typical of Western intellectual culture ever since. How could the infinite, transcendent, and incomprehensible Creator reveal himself in the words of folk from the primitive Near East thousands of years ago? This, too, seems absurd! Again, the Christian will reply, as we have already had occasion to point out, that it must be possible, since God has done it, and does it still, by so applying to us what he said to others in the past that we come to know with certainty what he says to us in the present. This also is a wise and glorious mystery, for from it flows saving knowledge. In both cases, the correct reply to criticism is found in the confession of God's salvation: how it was wrought in the first case, and how it is grasped and enjoyed in the second case. In neither case, however, does the correct answer always remove the offense which the criticism expresses.

God's condescension, we now see, is one aspect of his saving grace, whereby both in the Son's incarnation and in the Bible's inspiration he brought about a full union and identity of divine with human, our salvation being his goal. Such condescension gloriously displays his self-humbling, self-giving love. Any suggestion, therefore, that the unity of divine and human, whether in Jesus or in Scripture, is less than complete will reduce our apprehension of this love, and thus in reality dishonor it. When patristic writers urged that the Christ of the gospels suffered impassibly, i.e. without feeling all the pain that we should have felt, or when they said that he suffered in his human nature apart from the divine whereas he wrought miracles in his divine nature apart from the human, they meant to honor him by highlighting his deity, but actually they took away his honor by questioning whether his condescension in becoming man was all that it seemed to be--whether, that is, Jesus was one fully divine-human person living in fully divine-human life throughout, or whether he was less than this. So, too, if it is urged that parts of Scripture which we think worthy of God are inspired, while parts which we think unworthy are not, the glory of God's condescension in so inspiring human witness to him that it becomes his own witness to himself is at once blurred. Biblical passages which are mundane and raw in matter or manner or both are not any less inspired on that account, just as the baby talk of a genius like Einstein talking to young children is not any less his speech because it is baby talk. What needs to be said here is that as all Jesus' words, works, and experiences were words, works, and experiences of

God the Son, so all the words of Scripture testifying to the God of grace, words of praise, prayer, narrative, celebration, teaching and so on, are words of God testifying by these means to himself. Only as this is said will the full glory of divine condescension, in inspiration as in incarnation, be grasped.

So now it appears that the confession of biblical *infallibility* and *inerrancy* (which words I treat as substantially synonymous) is important, not simply as undergirding Scripture's function as our divine authority for faith and practice, the whole teaching of which we receive as from the Lord, but also as showing the measure and extent of God's gracious condescension in bringing us to know him savingly. For inerrancy and infallibility are entailed by inspiration, and inspiration, like incarnation, is a fruit of divine condescension. From this standpoint, biblical inerrancy is part of the doctrine of grace, and God's action in giving us a totally trustworthy Bible is a marvellous benefit. We may feel a certain lack of credibility when folk who question inerrancy claim still to be grateful for the Bible, despite their uncertainty as to how much of it they can trust; but certainly, those who know they have received, as it were from their Saviour's own hand, a Bible which they can trust absolutely, as imparting to them the mind and knowledge and will of their God, will thank him for this his second unspeakable gift with joy that knows no bounds.

THE ADEQUACY OF BIBLICAL LANGUAGE

It is asked whether biblical language is adequate to communicate knowledge about God. In the foregoing pages we have tried to spell out the principles which entitle us to affirm that it is. The key fact, as we saw, is the theomorphism of created man, whom God made a language-user, able to receive God's linguistic communication and to respond in kind. But it is important, in saying this, not to appear to claim too much. If we ask what knowledge about God biblical language communicates, the answer is, not the exhaustive knowledge of himself and of all things in relation to him which is distinctively his, but just that knowledge of these matters which he sees to be adequate--that is, sufficient--for our life of faith and obedience. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). This, in concrete terms, is the adequacy of biblical language: it suffices, not indeed to make us omniscient in any area, but as "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" in discipleship (Ps. 119:105). Those who doubt biblical inerrancy certainly claim too little with regard to the certainties that Bible-readers may have, but it will not right the boat for those who affirm inerrancy to claim too much, and we may all of us need a warning here. What we know is that as Jesus Christ is adequate to bring us to God, so Holy Scripture is adequate to bring us to Jesus Christ, and that where acknowledgment of Scripture as adequate verbal communication from God is lacking, adequate acknowledgment of Jesus Christ is likely to be lacking too. If we can make plain to the church and to the world that our concern in contending for biblical inerrancy is in the first instance soteriological, obediential, doxological, and devotional--not rationalistic, therefore, but religious--we shall do well; if not, we shall do much less well. And failure here would be tragic! May it not be.

APPENDIX TO COMMUNICATION AND CONDESCENSION

J. I. Packer

NOTES ON SOME TECHNICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT BIBLICAL AND CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE

If our argument in the main paper was right, the apt model for understanding how God communicates with us is our own verbal communication with each other, by oral and written discourse, and we should approach the Bible in the light of the following principles:

1. God made us in his own image (that is, among other things, reasoners and language-users) so that he could address us through the medium of language, the means by which we address each other, and so draw us into a genuinely personal response to himself, in which we in turn use language to address him, the language of prayer and praise. The supreme demonstration of this is the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate.
2. Scripture, which in its character as human witness to God records many direct verbal communications from God to particular men, is through inspiration also, equally and indeed primarily God's own witness to himself. Imagine your boss handing to you, as one of his employees, a policy memorandum written by some of his personal staff, and assuring you as he does so that it exactly expresses his mind; this is a situation parallel to that in which a Christian comes by God's providence to possess a Bible. The employee, no doubt has some general idea of the boss's goals and strategy before ever he reads the memo, inasmuch as he belongs to the firm, but by studying the memo he comes to know the boss's mind with a precision not otherwise attainable. So with members of the Christian church as they study their Bibles.
3. The men who wrote the biblical books had in view a readership contemporary with themselves, and wrote to be understood by that readership. So our task in biblical interpretation is twofold: first, to fix the historical meaning of each book (what it was saying to its first intended readers), and second to apply to ourselves the truths about God and man which the original message embodied. We go to school with Abraham, Moses, David, Job, Jeremiah, Paul, the Israelites in the wilderness, and before and after the exile, the churches at Corinth, Colossae, Laodicea, and so on. We watch God dealing with these folk, overhearing what he said to them and seeing what he did to and for them, and hence, in the manner of flies on the wall or observers in the classroom, we learn by inference his mind and will concerning us. Through the understanding which God gives us of his ways with and his will for these biblical characters he draws near to call, correct, and challenge us today. Through the Spirit's agency Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), steps out of the gospel stories to confront us with the same issues of faith, obedience, repentance, righteousness, and discipleship with which he faced

men when he was on earth. This is biblical interpretation: seeing first what the text *meant*, and then what it *means*--that is, how what it says touches our lives.

4. While commentaries supply historical meanings, only the Holy Spirit can enable our sin-darkened minds to discern how biblical teaching applies to us. Prayerful dependence on the Spirit's help is therefore necessary if our attempts at interpretation are ever to succeed. For historical exegesis only becomes interpretation when the application is truly made.

5. Since all Scripture is God preaching in and through the preaching of his servants (for every biblical book is edifying in intention, and therefore homiletical in thrust), it is through being preached, and heard and read as preaching, that it is most fully understood.

On the basis of these principles, more or less clearly focused and kept in view, the international, multi-racial, multi-cultural community called the church, consisting of educated and uneducated, clever and less clever folk together, has sought to learn of God and hear his voice speaking in and through his Word; and the solid testimony of the centuries is that precisely this has happened.

Against the background of these centuries of world-wide Christian experience, one would not expect to find it asserted that it is impossible to talk significantly about God, or to treat any biblical or ecclesiastical utterances which purport to refer to him as fact-stating. This, however, is what certain professional teachers of philosophy in Western universities during the past half-century have claimed, as we indicated in pp. 6 and 13 of the main paper. They do not deny that such utterances may express and communicate the speaker's emotional or volitional attitudes (see, for instance, R. G. Braithwaite's analysis of religious assertions as expressing commitment to a behavior policy--in the case of Christian assertions, commitment to an agapeistic way of life);¹ what they deny is that these utterances can state public facts about God, i.e. inform us of things concerning him which are the case irrespective of what any particular person thinks, feels or intends.

What reasons are given for taking up this position? The essential claim which all these teachers make in some form is that statements about God cannot fulfill the conditions of significant fact-stating speech. These conditions, it is urged, are (1) *specifiability*--you must be able to show that you are talking about something real, and to show how that something is to be identified and distinguished from all other realities--and (2) *verifiability* or, at least, *falsifiability*--you must be able to show what would confirm the statement as

¹See R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (CUP, 1955, reprinted in *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell, CUP, 1971, pp. 72 ff.) 'A religious assertion, for me, is the assertion of an intention to carry out a certain behavior policy, subsumable under a sufficiently general principle to be a moral one, together with the implicit or explicit statement, but not the assertion, of certain stories' (*op cit.*, p. 89).

true, or at least what would count against it. But, it is urged, this is something which practitioners of God-talk can never do.² Let us look at these points in order.

(1) It is argued that God is not *specifiable*, in the sense that when one speaks of him there is no way of telling what one is talking about. There are two questions here: whether the word 'God' connotes a specific being, distinguishable in thought from all other beings, and whether, if so, such a being exists, as distinct from being an insubstantial fantasy. The following responses suggest themselves.

First, the word 'God' on Christian lips refers to the Creator-Redeemer whose actions and character are described in the canonical Scriptures.

Second, there are two sorts of reasons which, at least *prima facie*, point to the real existence of a Creator-Redeemer corresponding to this description. First, there are historical facts which seem inexplicable on any other hypothesis, notably the existence and character of the Christian church and the existence and contents of the Holy Scriptures. Second, there are the facts of religious experience, whereby countless human lives have been changed morally in such a way that facets of Christlikeness now appear in them which previously seemed right out of their natural reach.

Two facts may have given color to the idea that God is not specifiable. The first is the unwillingness of much Protestant theology in this century to treat biblical statements about God as revealed descriptions rather than high-minded guesses. The second is the observed defects of the classical Thomist doctrine of analogy, which was supposed to enable us to specify God in fundamental ways on the basis of natural theology alone, without appeal to the Bible (an intrinsically invalid method for fallen minds, some Protestants would think). A word about these defects may be in order. Analogy was thought of as a kind and degree of likeness or correspondence of creature and Creator to each other. Two sorts of analogy were posited: the analogy of *attribution*, whereby formal qualities in man were held to correspond to qualities in God which ontologically were their creative cause, and the analogy of *proportionality*, whereby it was affirmed that God and man shared common qualities in a way appropriate to their distinct natures (e.g. the quality of existence: necessary and underived in God, contingent and derived in man). But neither of these modes of analogy, when pursued in the classical Thomist manner apart from reference to God's self-presentation in Scripture and on the basis of a cosmological 'proof' of his reality alone, yields determinate positive knowledge of what God is. The analogy of attribution requires us to ascribe to God all conceivable predicates, at least 'virtually,' and thus proves to be saying only that God *somehow* causes everything that we are. The analogy of proportionality likewise fails to tell us how the characteristic predicated of both God and man is differentiated in the former from what it is in the latter. The classical doctrine of analogy does indeed seem to leave God unspecified and unspecifiable.³

²See, for expositions of this line of thought, A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd ed., (London: Gollancz, 1946); A. Flew in "Theology and Falsification," *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 13 ff.; Kai Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1971).

³This critique is well developed by F. Ferré, *op cit.*, ch. 5.

There is, however, another use for the word 'analogy' altogether, namely as a description of the way in which the Bible, and Christian theological and liturgical speech, following the Bible, use of God predicates like 'father,' 'loving,' 'wise,' 'just,' which are normally used of human beings who are finite. They are said to be used in reference to God not *univocally*, i.e. in exactly the same sense as that in which they are used of man, nor *equivocally*, i.e. in an entirely different sense, but *analogically*, so that only some of the implications of their normal use carry over. To the question, how much of the original meaning remains, Basil Mitchell replies by giving the following rule:

A word should be presumed to carry with it as many of the original entailments as the new context allows, and this is determined by their compatibility with the other descriptions which there is reason to believe also apply to God. That God is incorporeal dictates that 'father' does not mean 'physical progenitor,' but the word continues to bear the connotation of tender protective care. Similarly God's 'wisdom' is qualified by the totality of other descriptions which are applicable to him; it does not, for example, have to be learned, since he is omniscient and eternal.⁴

This rule seems correct and valuable as a guide both for apprehending what God tells us of himself through the biblical writers, and for learning to shape our own speech in a way that reproduces the substance of this biblical witness.

(2) It is argued that statements about God are neither *verifiable* nor *falsifiable*, and that this renders them vacuous: the fact that you do not know (so it is urged) what would tend to confirm or disprove them shows that they can have no determinate meaning, even to you who make them. (There is a strong element of putting the Christian on the spot in all expositions of this point known to me, hence my *ad hominem* way of putting it here.) To this general thesis a five-point reply may be made:

1. If, as so often in discussions of this point, very general statements about God (e.g., 'God loves men') are considered in isolation, it can be made to look very hard to determine what they mean when a Christian asserts them; just because they are being considered out of context, their implications have to be laboriously beaten out as the discussion proceeds, and the impression can easily be given that rigorous logical analysis is hounding the Christians from pillar to post. At the start, therefore, it should be said that any assertions about God which Christians make are part of a coherent system of thought learned at each point from the testimony of the Bible (which is itself demonstrably coherent in its teaching), and the meaning of these assertions is finally fixed by the system as a whole.

2. If it be said, in the manner of early logical positivism, that the meaning of an empirical statement (as distinct from an analytic statement, which is true by definition) is the method of its verification, or depends on knowing

⁴Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 19.

what would have to be done to verify it, the sufficient answer is that this verification principle cannot itself be empirically verified, so that the positivist position self-destructs as being by its own standards meaningless.⁵

3. A great deal that Christians, echoing Scripture, affirm about God has to do with future experiences of weal or woe, stretching ultimately beyond this life, which he will bring about. In the nature of the case such assertions (which at this point are like our own promises) can only be verified by future events fulfilling them. But the conceivability of this eschatological verification shows that they are entirely meaningful, in strictest verificationist terms.

4. If it be said, as later logical empiricists allow, that the question of meaning depends on what the statement in question is held to presuppose and to imply, and the question of its truth, once its meaning is determined, is a matter of evidence, then it will not be hard to say either what the various assertions of which Christian belief is made up mean, or what states of affairs would in principle tend to verify or falsify them. If, for instance, there were reason to think that Jesus never existed, or, if he did, he never rose from the dead, this would effectively falsify the Christian claim. But in fact there is no reason to think this, and every reason to think the opposite.

5. If it be allowed, as it should be, that verification can take the form of trustworthy assurance as well as of actual or possible experiences or observations, then it may properly be said that the testimony of our truth-telling God in Holy Scripture is itself the most cogent verification of all that we believe.

The burden of these all-too-brief notes is to show that the logical grounds that are sometimes alleged for discounting Christian and biblical language about God as not being fact-stating are not cogent. The details of the philosophical doctrines which underlie this skepticism have not been exposed at all; suffice it to have shown that, so far as criticism of Christian discourse is concerned, the skeptics have not established their point.

⁵See on this C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word), ch. 5.

THE HUMAN AUTHORSHIP OF INSPIRED SCRIPTURE

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PAPER SUMMARY

Attention to the humanness of the Bible's writers has led some to deny its inerrancy alleging that Scripture is time-bound and merely of functional value. In contrast, this paper proposes that the Bible's teaching is truly divine and truly human without error, just as Jesus Christ was truly divine and truly human without sin. The inerrancy of finite, fallen human authors must be understood in the context of orthodox doctrines of God, creation, providence and miracle. The human writers were not autonomous, but lived and moved and had their being in the all-wise Lord of All. Created with a capacity for self-transcendence in the image of God, they could receive changeless truths by revelation. Providentially prepared by God in their unique personalities, they also had characteristics common to all other human beings in all times and cultures. Their teaching originated, however, not with their own wills, but God's and came to them through a variety of means. In all the human writing processes, they were supernaturally overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, not in a way analogous to mechanical or unworthy human relationships, but as one loving person effectually influences another. What stands written, therefore, in human language is not merely human, but also divine. What the human sentences teach, God teaches. The Bible's affirmations

conform to the mind of God and to the reality God created. While time-related, they are not time-bound. They are objectively true for all people of all times and cultures, whether received or not. The reason the Bible can function effectively to bring people to Christ is that its teachings are inerrant.

THE HUMAN AUTHORSHIP OF INSPIRED SCRIPTURE

Gordon R. Lewis

This paper addresses itself to the humanness of the writers of Scripture, an aspect often neglected or minimized in evangelical works.

The first section surveys the contributions of influential recent theologians who have found the humanness of the writers inconsistent with inerrancy.

Having felt the force of their arguments for the relativism of biblical teaching, the second section of this paper seeks to outline directions in which one may go in accounting for the humanness of the biblical authors and at the same time affirming the inerrancy of their teaching. Because of the complexity of the subject, this paper must be considered merely a preliminary draft of a major book or books needed on this issue with all of its ramifications.

Many find scholars in recent times suggest that defenders of an orthodox view of inspiration have failed to do justice to the Bible's humanity. Clark Pinnock, after a survey of liberal, new reformation and conservative evangelical perspectives in *Biblical Authority* concluded, "The prime theological issue which became evident in our survey of options on biblical authority is the need to maintain with equal force both the humanity and divinity of the word of Scripture."¹

Conservative evangelicals, Pinnock indicated, have bordered on the Docetic heresy. "Although Protestant orthodoxy confesses both the divine and the human element in the Bible, as it also does in Christology, it has been happier affirming its divine authority than admitting its human characteristics." The position will remain unbalanced, Pinnock insists, "until full justice is done to the human traits as well."² One has to agree, after considerable research, that not as much attention has been devoted to the human as to the divine side by conservative scholars. This may be explained because of the need to defend its divine side, and because of the complexities consideration of the humanity involves. Nevertheless, the neglect of the human aspect in comparison with the divine can hardly be denied.

At the same time, we miss in Pinnock's recent plea a crucial distinction he made in 1971 (in his *Biblical Revelation*) between the human and the sinful or erroneous. He spoke strongly against "the puerile maxim: 'To err is human--Scripture is human--therefore Scripture errs.'" For error is no more required of the Bible's humanity than sin is of Christ's." Pinnock then proposed a

¹Clark Pinnock, "Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology," in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Waco, Texas: Word, 1977), p. 71.

²Ibid., pp. 60-61.

better maxim: "To err is human--ergo, God gave the Scripture by inspiration--so that it does not err."³

Clearly sin is not part of the human essence as created, as shared by Jesus Christ, or as it will be in its glorified state. There can be no a priori verdict, therefore, that because human writers contributed to the Scriptures, it is errant. We must examine both hypotheses to see which best accounts for the data. First we shall survey the views of those who support the hypothesis that the humanness of the Bible makes inerrancy untenable, and subsequently the hypothesis that the true humanity of the biblical writers is consistent with inerrancy.

THE AUTHORS' HUMANNESS IS INCONSISTENT WITH INERRANCY

For many years now the thinking of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich have stimulated a chorus of writers insisting that the Bible was written by frail, fallible human beings whose errant witness nevertheless occasions encounters with God or union with the ground of being. Although a review of the arguments of these men would be helpful, space limits us to more recent publications. To help see and feel the problem, we shall look briefly at the Reformed writer Harry Boer and three Roman Catholics: Charles Davis, Leslie Dewart, and Hans Küng. A far more thorough consideration is merited by the extensive treatment of the human side of the Bible in G. C. Berkouwer's *Holy Scripture*.

Harry Boer

A passionate call to devote more attention to the human side of Scripture has come from Harry Boer's *Above the Battle? The Bible and Its Critics*. The Reformed missionary teacher asks, "Does the Word of God written sustain the same relationship to other literature as the personal Word made flesh sustains to our humanity?" Again, "Has the Word of God entrusted to prophets and apostles become human literature in the same sense in which the eternal Logos became a human being?" Boer replies, "The answer to these questions, at least from the Reformed segment of the church, has been a definite Yes."⁴ He adds that the Bible "is a collection of writings which *as literary entities* have been produced by men in the same way in which any other book has been written."⁵ There can be little question what is meant when he says, "I wish now to emphasize that the books of the Bible as a collection of religious writings are as human as *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Paradise Lost*, or Spurgeon's *Sermons*."⁶ He concludes, whatever divine inspiration may mean, the Bible "lies before us in the form a thoroughly human product."⁷

³Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), p. 176.

⁴Harry R. Boer, *Above the Battle? The Bible and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 45.

⁵Ibid., p. 42.

⁶Ibid., pp. 75-76.

⁷Ibid., p. 42.

An illicit analogy appears in Boer's parallel between the humanity of Christ and the humanity of the Bible. Although Christ was fully human, Boer does not affirm that He was sinful. Nevertheless, Boer berates those who have a docetic Bible and stresses its humanity attempting to support his case for its alleged errors of logic and fact.⁸ If true humanness on the part of the scriptural authors implied errancy, then to have a valid analogy to Christ he must argue that true humanness implied Christ's sinfulness. The more characteristic Reformed analogy is between the humanness of Christ without sin to the humanness of the Bible without error.

Charles Davis

The humanness of any writer implies the relativity of his writing, according to Charles Davis. Truth can exist only in changing human minds, and although some degree of objectivity can be attained, it is "always related to the knowing subject, so that all human truth is involved in the developing human intelligence." Hence all concepts share "in the imperfections, progress, and frequent tentativeness of all human thinking."⁹

Obviously drawing upon Reinhold Niebuhr, Davis emphasizes the human capacity of self-transcendence. People move from one standpoint to the next, one historical perspective to another and so never arrive at the truth. At best they only attain their truth. Illustrating his point, Davis writes:

. . . as a knowing subject man is like a person who cannot obtain a complete aerial view of a region, but has to move from hill to hill gradually to build up his mental picture of the lie of the land, except that with the knowledge in general the hills to be climbed are without number.¹⁰

The doctrinal content of the Christian faith, including the Roman Catholic traditions and papal bulls are given in historical process and from particular standpoints. None of these can be regarded as absolutes, therefore, as "unalterable concepts and immutable propositions existing outside history" or giving a "God's-eye view."¹¹

Relentlessly, Davis pursues the implications of the relativity of human thought. "It is impossible therefore, to isolate an absolute, unchanging core of Christian belief. To try to do so is an illusory project, because it is in effect an attempt to remove Christian belief from history."¹² Not even the gospel is exempt from relativism.

⁸Ibid., p. 44.

⁹Charles Davis, *A Question of Conscience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 234.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 235.

¹¹Ibid., p. 237.

¹²Ibid.

Granted that a central message can be distinguished from secondary elements, the formulation of that message is always culturally conditioned and from a particular standpoint. Each age will ask new questions about its meaning and seek to formulate it afresh. There is no pure essence of Christian belief, abstracted from historically conditioned teaching.¹³

How does Davis view the actual statements of Scripture?

What is true of Christian tradition generally is true of the Bible. The Bible is a unique and indispensable witness to God's revelation, which culminated in Christ. It is not, however, free from the limitations of its cultural context, or rather contexts, nor is it entirely without error. The limitations and errors do not destroy the unity and continuity of its teaching nor the fact that it embodies the absolute truth of God's Word. At the same time, it is a human and historical document, subject as such to inevitable imperfections and limitations. While it will remain the perennial centre of the Christian tradition and never be rendered obsolete, both in itself and in its interpretation, it must be regarded as existing within the historical process. It cannot be isolated from history as an unhistorical absolute.¹⁴

Notice what is at stake in Davis' view. The humanness of Scripture means the historical relativism of all its teaching. Consequently, Davis has no changeless kerygma or gospel message. The Bible is not revelation; the Bible is a fallible human witness to revelation.

Leslie Dewart

For Leslie Dewart, the relativism of all human knowledge involves a revision of this thinking about the nature of truth. Truth cannot be considered the conformity of an assertion to reality. He finds the assumption that he can know anything about reality contrary to his logic and observation. To know anything in itself or as it really is, assumes that "we can conceive and understand knowledge from the outside, as if we could witness from a third 'higher' point of view the union of two lower things, object and subject."¹⁵

Given Dewart's antisupernatural assumption at this point, there is no higher point of view. Some degree of self-transcendence will not achieve an eternal perspective. However, on supernaturalist views of special revelation and inspiration the human writers receive an outside view including both the knower and the object known. The Scriptures originate with God.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 237-238.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁵ Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 95.

The concepts in which Christian beliefs are cast, Dewart thinks, are "true" not in virtue of their representative adequacy but in virtue of their efficacious adequacy as generative forms of the truth of religious experiences."¹⁶ A concept is true, he explains, "if it causes . . . a true human experience. Adequacy is viewed, not as conformity, but adjustment, usefulness, expediency, proficiency, sufficiency, and adaptation for the 'believer.'"¹⁷ The debatable assumption here is that you can have efficacious adequacy without truths about reality as it is. How odd that the Spirit's work of inspiration is no longer efficacious to help the biblical writers tell it like it is, but one's interpretation of his experience becomes efficacious.

Dewart has another argument against the inerrancy of the gospel:

This might be put more graphically in an epigram: we can search for the essence of Christianity behind its cultural manifestations only as long as we assume either that we can become conscious of God's self-revelation without God's use of any language (modernism), or else that God's mother tongues are Hebrew and Greek.¹⁸

I make a few brief comments in response at this point. We need not look for the essential truth of Christianity behind the Scripture, for it is conveyed in its teaching. God, who could have given His revelation in any language and any culture, freely chose to present it in Hebrew and Greek with the respective cultures. These languages are not God's "mother-tongues," as if God were in any sense limited to them. But He created man in His image with linguistic ability to think His thoughts after Him.

Hans Küng

Another recent Catholic writer who has stressed the relativity of the human factor in Scripture shows that it requires a new concept of faith and revelation. Hans Küng's massive work *On Being a Christian* without hesitation asserts that the Bible

is unequivocally man's word: collected, written down, given varied emphasis, sentence by sentence by quite definite individuals and developed in different ways. Hence it is not without shortcomings and mistakes, concealment and confusion, limitations and errors.¹⁹

Through their errors the biblical writers "are witnesses of faith and speak of the real ground and content of faith." He claims their witness is "frequently in halting speech and with utterly inadequate terminology."²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁹ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 465.

Flatly, he says, the Scriptures are not divine revelation.²¹ Furthermore, they do not present historical or scientific truth. The biblical meaning of truth, Küng thinks, designates

the fidelity, constancy, trustworthiness of God himself who stands by his word and promises. There is not a single text in Scripture asserting its freedom from error. But every text in its wider or narrower context attests this unswerving fidelity of God to man, preventing God from ever becoming a liar.²²

Küng does not limit his view to the results of inspiration, but speaks of its non-miraculous mode. He rejects the notion of a supernatural work of the Spirit limited to a particular act of writing, preferring to speak of the writers as other New Testament believers, as Spirit-pervaded and Spirit-filled in their whole pre-history. I may observe that there is no need to make a choice for either a providential preparation or a supernatural inspiration at the time of writing. Both have been maintained.

The Bible is inspired, Küng believes, basically because it is inspiring. Acknowledging his indebtedness to Karl Barth, Küng holds that man's word in the Bible becomes God's word for anyone who submits trustfully and in faith to its testimony and so to the God revealed in it and to Jesus Christ.²³ How can one submit trustfully to erroneous testimony? In spite of all the critical problems, "In all the words he grasps the Word, in the different gospels the one Gospel." A reader of Scripture must allow himself to be inspired by the Spirit and "the question whether and how the Bible itself is inspired word is far less important--even for the text of 2 Timothy mentioned above (3:16-17)--than the question of how man himself allows himself to be inspired by its word."²⁴ So the important thing is man's allowing the Spirit to work, not the inspiration of the original writers of the Bible.

Summing up, Boer, Davis, Dewart, and Küng have pointed out some of the implications of recognizing the humanity of biblical writers. All reject a biblical inerrancy. Boer thinks the critical problems insuperable. Davis eliminates any core of doctrines or kerygma from the essence of Christianity, Dewart is left with no way of knowing reality as it is, whether the reality of God or of the world, so that truth is not tested by conformity with reality, but by its functional values to him. Küng denies that the Bible is divine revelation, and considers it simply a fallible human witness to something totally other than any human concept can designate.

Boer tries to maintain an infallibility without inerrancy, but it is difficult to distinguish it from merely functional value of the others. Literally, Davis, Dewart, and Küng see that once you accept the humanity and relativism

²¹ Ibid., p. 466.

²² Ibid., pp. 466-467.

²³ Ibid., p. 467.

²⁴ Ibid.

of all human concepts and words, there is no exemption for biblical assertions regarding Christ or salvation in the gospel.

G. C. Berkouwer

Unquestionably, one of the most thorough treatments of the humanity of Scripture comes from the pen of G. C. Berkouwer. His major volume entitled *Holy Scripture* presents a vigorous call to attend more perceptively to the Bible's humanity, with all that he thinks that implies.

Early in his book, Berkouwer notes that "the church's tendency to minimize the human aspect of Scripture must be clearly recognized."²⁵ The human character of Scripture "is not an accidental or peripheral condition of the Word of God but something that legitimately deserves our full attention."²⁶ Although the church's confessions had never denied this human element, it was the rise of historical criticism that focused attention toward it. Fundamentalism, in its defensiveness "does not fully realize the significance of Holy Scripture as a prophetic-apostolic, and consequently human testimony."²⁷ At stake is nothing other than God's way with and in Scripture. However, "Fundamentalism has hardly come to grips with the problem of whether attention for the human character of Holy Scripture might be of great importance for its correct understanding."²⁸ By an a priori acceptance of Scriptural inerrancy, fundamentalists preclude all dangers and ignore its human aspect.²⁹ No a priori theory, Berkouwer insists, can be the basis of certainty.³⁰

Even though Berkouwer rejects the analogy between Christ and the Scriptures at some other points, he sees a similarity to Docetism in Christology in the minimizing of the human aspect of Scripture in order to emphasize fully its divine character. The mere recognition of a human element is no guarantee, he observes, that justice is done to it.³¹

No affirmation of a *propositional revelation* appears in Berkouwer's treatment of Scripture. Instead, he warns of an artificial view of revelation that is threatened by a study of the human side of Scripture.³² "God's revelation must not be seen as a timeless and supra-historical event, but as a manifestation in history."³³ In view of the human, historical, and critical factors, Berkouwer cannot accept the interpretations of the creeds affirming that

²⁵G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 18.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 34.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 18.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 19.

³³*Ibid.*

Holy Scripture is the Word of God in such a manner that Scripture's divinity was thought to be found in its inner substantial form and had become an essential predicate of Holy Scripture as an inspired book that was elevated to the level of a source of supernatural truths.³⁴

For Berkouwer the teachings of Scripture are not the supernaturally revealed Word of God, nor the object of the Spirit's inspiration. Such "rationalization" introduces illegitimate foreign elements to the mystery of the Spirit.³⁵ To affirm that the Bible teaches specially revealed truths obscures the relation to the testimony of the Spirit and gives the concept of revelation more and more formal traits. He is against such externalization, literalism, and abstracting from the testimony making revelation come in mere word and letters.³⁶ Scripture is part of a complex organic process of revelation³⁷ and he refused to speculate on the mode of revelation.³⁸ Surely, however, there was no special language of revelation.³⁹

How then does Berkouwer understand *inspiration*? It is a factor in the organic process, not a supernatural or miraculous phenomenon.⁴⁰ In the words of men, active and not passive men, God breathes to accomplish an instrumental purpose, a witness to Christ. "Scripture is the Word of God because the Holy Spirit witnesses in it of Christ."⁴¹ This witness must never be allowed to fade into a formal concept of inspiration, but it does not mean that it is not related to the words. Warnings are frequent that we must not approach the subject of inspiration with arguments concerning form and cause.⁴² Students of Scripture must avoid a problems approach and simply accept the mystery of the Spirit's witness.⁴³

The doctrine of inspiration in Berkouwer tends to become primarily a doctrine of illumination. Although he says 2 Timothy 3:16-17 points to the mystery of the words of man being filled with truth and trustworthiness and to an essential relationship between the breath of the Spirit and the *graphē*, he writes, "Nevertheless, one hears in this passage that the written Scripture cannot be understood in a correct way without the breath of the Spirit."⁴⁴ He finds a

³⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 201.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 145, 151, 152, 154.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 162.

⁴² Ibid., p. 166.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 168.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

primarily functional character of Paul's God-breathed words related to salvation.⁴⁵ Throughout Scripture, man comes to the fore so that there is a very close connection between God's speaking and the human words.⁴⁶ But no one can ignore God's speaking via the humanness of the prophetic words. "One might speak here of 'identification' not as a mixture of the divine and the human, but in the sense of this 'sending,' this employing whereby the Word of God indeed comes to us just as it is upon the tongue of the prophets."⁴⁷

What the Bible teaches is *time-bound* and *relative*. As time-bound it reflects the localities and situations of the periods in which it was written. Not only does the Bible come to us through changing circumstances, but also in ideas and concepts determined by the time of writing.⁴⁸ "One must take note of the cultural context and intent of the words within that period precisely *in order* to hear the Word of God."⁴⁹ This relativism, Berkouwer claims, does not lead to historicization. It does not adopt the conclusion of the absolute relativity of all that is historical because that is "a conclusion which would exclude the mystery of the God-breathed Scripture."⁵⁰ One wonders why arriving at the same conclusion a posteriori would not face the same criticism. Berkouwer does not seek to distinguish within Scripture between the word of God and the word of men, it is all the word of men.

Ambiguously Berkouwer says the Scripture is time-related and has universal authority.⁵¹ I say ambiguous because the writings are time-related, and not the writings, but the Spirit's witness has universal authority. Berkouwer uses Paul's statement concerning ministers, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." He explains, "The earthen vessel does not stand in the way of God's voice precisely because the power of God is manifested in it and not because man in his own power has this treasure at his disposal."⁵² Alleging that his view represents that of the Reformers, Berkouwer says that they emphasized that the message of salvation really came through the Scriptures. This implied an accessibility that was not in terms of a theoretical construction.⁵³ One of Berkouwer's favorite passages assures him that although the writings of the Bible are time-bound, the Word of God is not bound (2 Tim. 2:9). So "there is every reason to remember the power of God's Word for all times, and the blessing of the Word that is not fettered."⁵⁴ Berkouwer thinks that he exalts the sovereignty of God by having Him reveal Himself through statements by men who were simply children of their limited times.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 145.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 187.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 190.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 194.

⁵² Ibid., p. 207.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 272.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

Although Berkouwer dismisses the concept of *inerrancy*, he retains a belief in the Bible's *infallibility*. He rejects inerrancy because he thinks it does not recognize the time-bound localities, the special circumstances, and the limited conceptions of the writers.⁵⁵ Furthermore, he thinks the view involves a serious formalization of the concept of error. Incorrectness is put on the same level as the concepts of sin and deception. In the third place, Berkouwer is apparently unaware that there are more than two ways to look at the Bible, his approach, which develops a view of reliability in agreement with the Bible's purpose (singular) and an a priori presuppositionalism which imposes a technical concept of reliability upon Scripture. He has ignored at least five of the six different epistemological routes in defense of the Bible's inerrancy I have expounded elsewhere.⁵⁶ By the Bible's infallibility Berkouwer means that the Spirit has not failed and will not fail in this mystery of God-breathed Scripture and that in our interaction with Scripture by faith we shall not be put to shame, but confirmed.⁵⁷

Rienhold Niebuhr built an impregnable wall of relativism so that no one could ever know *the* truth, but only *his* truth. However, he made an exception for one thought beyond all thought, a Christian dialectic or paradox of grace. But he did such an effective job of showing that no finite, fallen person could have final truth, that it was difficult to take him seriously when he claimed finality for Christianity. Similarly, Paul Tillich affirmed the relativism of every theological statement, except the assertion that God is being itself. It is difficult to maintain an absolute (!) relativism.

Like both Niebuhr and Tillich, Berkouwer makes an *exception* to his consignment of every human affirmation to time-bound relativity. In his consideration of Christ's resurrection, he finds the differences of wording totally different from falsification which projects a wrong and misleading image.⁵⁸ Although the biblical writers had "freedom in composing and expressing the mystery of Christ"⁵⁹ clearly their aim was not to mislead and to deceive, or to relate history in a manner "eternalizing or abstract."⁶⁰ Here the apostle's language informs us that the reality of salvation does not take a flight from reality. Why must we assent mentally to these assertions of fact? Because "everything is at stake," just as all preaching and faith are in vain if Christ has not been raised (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). The testimony of preaching would be false, since it would not be backed by the truth (1 Cor. 15:15). Berkouwer here affirms cognitive truth about historical reality when he says, "The idea is sharply condemned throughout the New Testament that the message of salvation could be a creation or a projection of men, a fabrication of the human spirit."⁶¹

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 264.

⁵⁶ Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth-Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago: Moody, 1976).

⁵⁷ Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, p. 266.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 252.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 253.

⁶¹ Ibid.

These assertions convey reliable statements of fact concerning what happened in reality. Here biblical language is not merely functional but informative, faith involves knowledge with assent to the resurrection. "The limit of all subjectivity and all variety in the portrayal of the mystery of Christ is the reliability of that which is passed on, which was seen, heard, and understood."⁶²

Christ's resurrection is no Bultmannian myth. "The difference between eternity and time does not mean that a saving event can no longer be discussed in terms of an act of God *in time*."⁶³ Quoting Barth against Bultmann, Berkouwer writes, "The conviction stands, so Barth concludes: 'We must still accept the resurrection of Jesus, and His subsequent appearances to His disciples, as genuine history in its own particular time.'"⁶⁴ Furthermore, "Thielicke said that the ancient world view 'left open the door for the idea of transcendence.' Therefore it is precisely fitting 'to express the otherness of God and His intervention in salvation history.'"⁶⁵ Apparently, then, the difference between eternity and time is not so great that we cannot affirm truth in time-bound human language concerning God's action in time and both objective and sacred history, even beyond the first century. In affirming Christ's resurrection, the Bible asserts a truth about history good for all time, and is in fact God's word written. It does more than point to Christ in these passages, and its statements are not regarded neutral or abstract.

In spite of many qualifications, for Berkouwer the assertions about the resurrection are no mere projection. It did occur in reality, and apparently his statements to this effect are not abstract, or merely formal. Since the fully human witness inspired by the Spirit is not allowed to fabricate matters at this point, there is no theological reason why the Spirit could not have kept them from error on anything of which they wrote. If in the central matters of the faith the truth attested is not merely relative to the knower and his times, but true (inerrant) for all people in all times, there is no a priori reason why on matters less directly related to salvation what they affirm may not represent the way it is in reality, in itself.

Since Berkouwer's view is given extensive evaluation in Paper No. 15, we will forego further criticism here. It will suffice here to note that his view is both inadequate and unorthodox.

THE AUTHORS' HUMANNESSE CONSISTENT WITH INERRANCY

In view of the multiple questions raised by those who view the humanness of Scripture to imply its conceptual relativism, a presentation of an alternative position ought not be oversimplified. Richard J. Coleman in a remarkably objective analysis of the issues between those he called liberals and those he called evangelicals, presents a significant challenge to both. To the defenders of inerrancy he writes:

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 256.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 258.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 259.

It is not enough for the evangelical to raise the importance of the conceptual side of revelation and faith; he must demonstrate ability to weld together objective doctrines about God and the contemporary experience of contingency and autonomy, faith in the Scriptural Word, and confidence in man's rational power to understand God.⁶⁶

The second aspect of Coleman's challenge must also remain in our minds as we seek to expound a view of conceptual truth as essential to Christianity, revelation, inspiration, and witness of the Spirit and faith.

In the future evangelicals must also give more attention to the inescapable question of relativity. The books and articles which have dealt with this subject from an evangelical viewpoint have been of little value. There is the understandable fear that to tackle this problem is to open Pandora's box, but nevertheless each year the crack becomes a little bigger. Recognition must be given to the hidden motivation to defend one's position by appealing to absolutes in a time of rapid change and loss of authority. The evangelical has been able to maintain an authoritative concept of revelation and Scripture only by being insensitive to the issue of historical relativity.⁶⁷

Coleman's challenge to evangelicals calls for a work too extensive for this present scope, but we shall try to outline at least some lines of approach.

The Human Authors Were Not Autonomous, But Under God

The writers of Scripture did not function in a vacuum. They lived and moved and had their being in God as all people do (Acts 17:28). Many of them express their sense of God's presence, God's call, God's holiness, God's protection, and God's compulsion to speak and write His Word. They sensed their dependence upon God and their obligation to know, love, and serve Him. It is important to focus more fully upon some of the aspects of their God-consciousness.

The God of the biblical authors, although actively involved with them, was self-existent, eternal, and unchanging. The writers were dependent; God was independent. God existed before the mountains were brought forth or people lived on earth (Ps. 90:1-2). He had life in Himself and was far from the abstract, static Being that doth be of the Greek philosophers (John 5:26). He was a living Spirit who actively created and sustained the world, and who entered into gracious covenant relationships with particular people. His being could be known in part. It was not that they could reason to God, but that He disclosed Himself to them as the Almighty and the I am. His being

⁶⁶Richard J. Coleman, *Issues of Theological Warfare: Evangelicals and Liberals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 101.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

was logically prior to His actions, His character to His functions. Words and actions disclosed not only the heart of men, but also the heart of God (Matt. 12:33-35).

As the disparate elements of biblical authors' teaching about God are entered into, it becomes clear that within the one eternal being are the three personal distinctions, Father, Son, and Spirit.⁶⁸ These distinctions, the Sabellians sought to reduce to mere relational distinctions of the one God at different times and places. But the attempt to dismiss the ontological realities of persons who could intercede with each other in holy love failed. Those who would dismiss all ontological knowledge of God as He is in Himself, surely know that they are thereby dismissing not just a "fundamentalist" view of revelation and inspiration, but an orthodox view of trinitarianism. In another place I have argued that views of revelation as act or analysis or revelatory encounters, and even fallible propositional content, cannot support the biblical authors' progressively revealed teaching about God.⁶⁹ With the departure of conceptual revelation and inerrancy, go many other classic aspects of Christianity.

The God in whom the biblical authors lived and moved and had their being was a God of truth (Ps. 119:151). This truth was not like the abstract forms in Plato's world of ideas. The logos of all things was with God and indeed was God (John 1:1-3). The designs of things were in the mind of the intelligent and powerful Creator. In His omniscience, He knows all that ever has been, is or will be and He knows what ought to be for His glory and the good of mankind. There can be no question whether His ideas conform to reality as it is and ought to be (John 14:6).

The biblical writers know that God's unlimited knowledge transcended their limited knowledge as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa. 55:8-9). By this they did not mean that God's knowledge was totally incommunicable to their minds in meaningful concepts. When the writers said, "God's ways are not your ways, they countered the expectations of the wicked, as the context and parallel passages show: "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa. 55:6; compare Ezek. 18:29; Pss. 36:5; 89:2; 103:11). According to Gustave Oehler's *Theology of the Old Testament*, the prophets "knew that the Spirit by which they were inspired was not the natural spirit of their nation; that their predictions were not the expression of popular expectations."⁷⁰

In its context, then, the statement "my thoughts are not your thoughts" does not support the anti-conceptualism of Barth, Berkouwer, and others. On the contrary, the emphasis of the passage is on the problem of the will following the everlasting covenant made with David (Isa. 55:3) which was made in

⁶⁸Gordon R. Lewis, *Decide for Yourself* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970), pp. 41-45.

⁶⁹Gordon R. Lewis, "Revelational Bases of Trinitarianism," *Christianity Today*, VII, 328-330 (January 4, 1963), pp. 20-22.

⁷⁰Gustave Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1883), p. 482.

meaningful assertions through a human language at a particular time and a particular place. Conceptual truth does not compel assent as Berkouwer imagines, as the history of the covenant people tragically reveals, and as Berkouwer himself exemplifies. The conceptual inerrancy of the covenants, promises, and judgments is not a sufficient condition. Important as it is, it needs the assurance of infallibility which follows that the word going forth from God's mouth "shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:10-11). No rejection of inerrant content is necessary to have the values of infallibility of purpose. Each needs the other.

When the biblical writers affirmed that God was true and faithful, they referred not only to the reliability of His instruction, but also to the fidelity of His character. They exclaimed, "How great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23). The integrity God maintains meant that He could not be tempted by evil nor tempt anyone (James 1:13). He is not a man that he should lie (Num. 23:19). He cannot deny Himself (Titus 1:2). It is immutably the case that God cannot lie (Heb. 6:17-18). There are several things that omnipotence itself cannot do.

Because God is true and faithful, it was unthinkable to the biblical authors that God could breathe out (inspire) any error through them. They rejoiced in the faithfulness of His words (Jer. 23:28), His commandments (Ps. 119:86) and His testimonies (Ps. 119:138). In their human tongues they declared His "faithful sayings" (2 Tim. 2:11, 13; Tit. 3:8). The incarnation of God, Jesus Christ, spoke in the language of a particular time and place words that remain faithful and true (Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 19:11).

In His faithfulness, God is sovereign and free. His freedom is not to deny Himself, contradict Himself, or misrepresent the reality He sustains. He always acts in accord with His nature. His freedom is that of self-determination, not arbitrary whims. The God of incomparable integrity can no more originate error than He could temptation or moral evil. Ascribing logical or factual errors to God's revelation does not magnify, but demeans His faithfulness, His integrity, His fidelity.

If the biblical authors' God was changeless in character and purposes, how could He relate to time and change? The divine mind which created man's in His image, has capacities similar to those by which man transcends the present instant of which he is conscious--for memory and expectation. The fact that God knows all temporal things simultaneously does not rule out a significant and real succession of events. Augustine illustrated this from the repetition of a memorized Psalm:

I am about to repeat a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my attention is extended to the whole; but when I have begun, as much of it as becomes past by my saying it is extended in my memory on account of what I have repeated, and my expectation, on account of what I am about to repeat; yet my consideration is present with me, through which that which was future may be carried over so that it may become past.⁷¹

⁷¹Augustine, *Confessions* XI, 28: *Great Books of The Western World*, pp. 18, 98.

In some such way God knows the entire sweep of history simultaneously, and yet carries out His activities of creation and providence successively in accord with His changeless plans. God's eternity is not like that of the philosophers whose God negates time or renders it illusory. And the absolutes knowable to God and man are not limited to universal forms of immutable nature. There may be absolutes as Bromiley suggested (above) for particulars. According to His eternal plans for time, God created a particular couple, chose a particular nation, sent His prophets to particular people at particular times, and finally sent His Son into history as a particular human being at a particular time. God is certainly not time-bound, but is active in time.

If the relation between time and eternity, however one explains it in detail, allows for the incarnation of Christ at a particular time and place, it allows for the inscripturation of the gospel in a particular language and culture. The gospel asserts certain facts: Jesus was the Christ, Jesus died, Jesus was buried, and Jesus rose. The gospel also asserts the meaning of those facts. Jesus died "for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Such assertions about events in realm of the relative, can be inerrantly or changelessly true, for what they assert conforms to the eternal plan of God for these particular events in time. The meaning "for our sins" is not time-bound in the sense that it was just an accepted opinion of some people during that phase in the world's development. The assertion is true for all human beings of all times, places, and situations. Two implications may be drawn from this.

On the one hand, if one's view of eternity and time allows for the inerrancy or absoluteness of the gospel in human concepts and language, it allows for the inerrancy of everything the Bible teaches. One may defend a limited inerrancy for the gospel and deny it elsewhere on other grounds. But having a view of eternity and time that permits faithful sayings concerning Jesus of Nazareth, he cannot say that the time relatedness of other information rules out the possibility of its inerrancy.

On the other hand, if one's view of eternity and time does not allow for any inerrant information, even regarding the gospel of Christ, then sooner or later he will see that his view of eternity and time also rules out an incarnation at a specific time and place. The depth of concern many feel for inerrancy is not merely for the integrity of the Scriptures themselves, it is also for the reliability of the gospel message and for the integrity of Jesus' claims for Himself as the Savior of the world. While appreciating Berkouwer's central emphasis upon redemption, we fear he has undermined the foundation for the universal validity of the gospel he seeks to emphasize.

The Human Authors Have Characteristics Common to All People as Created in God's Image

The conceptual relativists may have become so preoccupied with the differences of people involved in history at different times that they have failed to incorporate the similarities. A scholarly approach must provide a responsible account of both similarities and differences. Because all human beings of all times and places have been created in God's image they have some common characteristics.

Man was created to fellowship with God and participate in His purposes in history. By creation man had a capacity for knowing God and sharing God's moral concerns, as the Holy and righteous One. Writing with respect to naturalistic evolutionists Carl Henry said:

humanistic anthropologists are prone to view man as a developing animal, and to regard all his basic dispositions as mere distillations of evolutionary experience. In deference to the theory of cultural relativity, they deny that any common principles or practices can be discerned in the history of humanity.⁷²

Henry then observes that:

Christianity has never denied the vast range of moral relativity in fallen history. But it explains those perverse notions of the good and the failure of those who truly know the good to do it (Rom. 7:19-23) by a principle far superior to ethical relativism--man's moral revolt against his holy Creator. Christianity, moreover, specifically rejects the notion that man's nature as man bears no structures other than those derived from evolutionary development. The forms of logic and morality are not derived from experience; rather they are what make human experience possible. As the Psalmist puts it, the horse and the mule 'have no understanding' (Ps. 32:9 KJV); it is patently obvious that animals have no religious propensities while on the other hand human history is replete with rational, moral, and religious concerns.⁷³

In addition to capacities for moral discernment, man has a capacity for self-transcendence. Like God, a human being can have present in his mind, as Augustine said, a memory of the past, consideration of the present, and expectation of the future. To the extent that these capacities are used, a person is not time-bound like an object. The biblical authors were not limited to knowledge of their own culture. Moses had been trained in the wisdom of the Egyptians. Others showed acquaintance with the nations surrounding Israel. Paul knew the philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans. The writers of Scripture knew different cultures and were able to transcend their own freely rejecting unjust influences and criticizing them. These writers were hardly conditioned in a behavioristic or almost helpless sense. Freely they adopted and endorsed some factors and freely they rejected others.

Furthermore, because created in God's image, man could develop ability to think and communicate in linguistic symbols. Eugene Nida, a linguistic expert on cultural differences has found that effective communication is possible among the diverse linguistic cultures of the world for three reasons:

⁷²Carl Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, II (Waco, Texas: Word, 1976), pp. 126-127.

⁷³Ibid., p. 127.

(1) the processes of human reasoning are essentially the same, irrespective of cultural diversity; (2) all people have a common range of experience, and (3) all peoples possess the capacity for at least some adjustment of the symbolic 'grids' of others.⁷⁴

Only by ignoring this fundamental datum of experience can relativists argue that a revelation in a particular language like Hebrew or Greek would be unintelligible to those of other languages. Cross-cultural communication may be time-consuming and difficult, but it is regularly done at the United Nations. At least the offensiveness of choosing a particular language for biblical revelation is lessened if one realizes that Greek and Hebrew participate in the common ranges of reasoning and experiencing of all other linguistic cultures.

The Scriptures indicate that a noetic aspect is part of the divine image in man. On this basis Paul exhorts, "Do not lie to each other, since you have put on the new self, which is being renewed in *knowledge* in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:9-10). The divine-like capacity for knowledge means we should not bear false witness against each other, misrepresent the facts or contradict ourselves. It is also given so that we may think God's thoughts after Him. The same context adds, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and counsel . . ." (Col. 3:16). Here "word" does not mean person, but information, as is predominantly the case in the Old and New Testament usage. By reason of the intellectual ability given by God, we communicate with God as well as others. We can love Him with mind as well as heart, worship in spirit and in truth, and pray not only with the spirit, but also with the understanding (Matt. 22:37; John 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:15).

It is unfortunate that Berkouwer, like Barth, has omitted the import of conceptual knowledge in the image of God. In Berkouwer's entire work on *Man: The Image of God*, there are but three allusions to Colossians 3:10 and none of them expounds the significance of the word knowledge.⁷⁵ Much of the difficulty Barth had with identifying the words of inspired man with the Word of God resulted from his failure to see that man's mind was made like God's, and so man can know truth. Barth by his own admission began with an extreme view of divine transcendence.

What expressions we used . . . above all the famous 'wholly other' breaking in upon us 'perpendicularly from above' the not less famous 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man, the vacuum, the mathematical point, and the tangent in which alone they must meet.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 90.

⁷⁵G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 45, 88, 98.

⁷⁶Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox, 1960), p. 41.

Barth then confessed:

We viewed this 'wholly other' in isolation, abstracted and absolutized, and set it over against man, this miserable wretch--not to say boxed his ears with it--in such fashion that it continually showed greater similarity to the deity of the God of the philosophers than to the deity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁷⁷

Barth came to see that God broke through to man in Christ's person, but never could identify the words of the inspired men with God's Word for God speaks only in Christ. In revelation, Barth said, we are concerned with the singular Word, spoken directly by God Himself, Christ.

But in the Bible we are invariably concerned with human attempts to repeat and reproduce in human thoughts and expressions, this Word of God in definite human situations. . . . In the one case *Deus dixit*, in the other *Paulus dixit*. These are two different things.⁷⁸

The Bible remained for Barth a merely fallible pointer to revelation. It is difficult to see that Berkouwer has significantly differed from Barth's doctrine of revelation in Christ alone. Although Berkouwer holds to a general revelation, it is totally obscured to the unbelieving.⁷⁹ But in Berkouwer's doctrine of special revelation, there is not an objective Scriptural content identified with the Word of God. The Bible remains merely a time-bound human witness to Christ.

By reason of creation in God's image intellectually, the categories of human thought (logical principles) and the categories of human speech (grammatical principles) need not be assumed totally other than God's. God made man to commune with Him in mind as well as spirit. Furthermore, God made man to rule the world and the world to be ruled by man, so that there is no reason to manufacture an unbiblical total difference between the categories of human thought and reality in the world. A basis for a knowledge of things as they are, not in themselves, but under God, is laid in the doctrine of creation of the world, and of man in God's image, in particular. Because of fallenness, however, naive realism is often misled by superstition, etc. So a critical realism requiring adequate criteria of verification is called for as in the thought of Edward John Carnell.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 45.

⁷⁸Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I*, I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), p. 127.

⁷⁹G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

⁸⁰Set forth in my *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, pp. 176-284.

The Human Authors' Unique Perspectives Were Prepared by Divine Providence

Granting some basic principles in common with all human beings, each biblical writer had his own unique combination of distinctive qualities. Each was conditioned by factors distinctive of his time and place. Each had a distinctive heredity and environment. Each had a distinctive type and level of education or training. Although living basically within a Judeo-Christian cultural environment, over some 15 centuries there were quite different cultural experiences within that community and with other surrounding cultures. Each had distinctive interests and emphases, evident for example, in the distinctive approaches of the four gospels to the significance of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Each has a distinctive vocabulary and writing style. Each has a distinctive cluster of natural and spiritual gifts. We can no more minimize the differences than the similarities.

Many immediately conclude that the many variables in the perspectives of the biblical authors necessitate the relativism of their teaching. Does not the limitedness of their perspectives influenced by countless variables keep them from writing absolute truth? If they actively participated in the research and writing, did they not distort God's truth? To grasp the response, one must reckon with the all-inclusiveness of God's providence.

It is sometimes said, "If you want to train a person, you should begin with his grandparents!" When a college student arrives at seminary, it is too late for professors to shape his heredity and early training. However, in God's eternal plans, He could guide in all such particular factors. The writing of Scripture was no last minute, emergency operation in which God had to use whatever He could find to work with. He who knew all things from the beginning graciously planned to communicate through the oral and written work of the prophets and apostles. Jeremiah was set apart from before his birth (Jer. 1:5), as was Paul (Gal. 1:15).

The Scriptures indicate that God's providential guidance relates to all things; *a fortiori*, it applies to His activities of revelation and inspiration, so indispensable to His total redemptive program. Unlike a human editor of the writings of a number of different men, God did not have to wait helplessly by to see what would come in. He could do far more than issue guidelines for the production. God, as an editor *par excellence*, could providentially bring into being the types of individuals, styles, and emphases He wanted. And that, if the doctrine of providence has not been lost, is what He did.

The awareness of conditioning factors in the lives of the biblical authors is not new. And B. B. Warfield was not insensitive to them. In his day the objection ran,

As light that passes through the colored glass of a cathedral window, is light from heaven, but it is stained by the tints of the glass through which it passes, so any word of God which is passed through the mind and soul of a man must come out discolored by the personality through which it is given, and just to that degree ceases to be the pure word of God.

In answer to that basic issue, Warfield wrote,

But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the word given through it just the coloring which it gives it? What if the colors of the stained glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them? What if the word of God that comes to His people is framed by God into the word of God it is, precisely by means of the qualities of the men formed by Him for the purpose, through which it is given? When we think of God the Lord giving by His Spirit a body of authoritative Scriptures to His people, we must remember that He is the God of providence and of grace as well as of revelation and inspiration, and that He holds all the lines of preparation as fully under His direction as He does the specific operation which we call technically, in the narrow sense, by the name of 'inspiration.'⁸¹

The distinctive humanness of each biblical writer is no embarrassment to God, any more than the distinctively human qualities of Jesus were. And just as God could disclose Himself truly in Jesus Christ, so He could disclose His thoughts truly in the teaching of His providentially prepared spokesmen. Uniqueness is as much in the absolute plans of God as sameness. The particulars of the world and of biblical origins are no more illusory than are the universal norms of morality and logical thought.

How did God prepare these writers? They received all the benefits of His common and special grace. God provided their food and drink, and all the necessities of life, preserved them from evil, restrained those who would have destroyed them, gave them natural gifts, guided and governed all the innumerable factors in their individual lives, families, school, and social and political environments. In addition, God graciously called them to Himself, justified them by faith, gave them spiritual gifts, set them apart to their respective works as prophetic or apostolic men. He edified them through the means of the collective people of God in the Old and New Testament settings, at their respective times and in their varied situations. In all of these and undoubtedly other ways, God prepared unique individuals for writing His Word.

The Human Authors' Teaching Originated With God

The Holy Spirit directed, not only in the personalities of the writers, but also in the conceptual frameworks with which they thought and wrote. Although the Bible witnesses of experiences with Christ, its language is not merely

⁸¹B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), pp. 155-156.

evocative. It is informative. Implied in the "witness" and explicit in the doctrinal and practical teaching sections is the conceptual instruction about what is and what ought to be. A conceptual revelation is only unthinkable if one denies the noetic element in the image of God and affirms an infinite qualitative distinction between God's mind and man's. Then God's unlimited truth must be accommodated to the writers' limited conceptual and linguistic capacities. By appealing to accommodation some have regarded the teaching of Scripture the frail and fallible word of man alone and not the Word of God. Accommodation to human "witness" rather than conceptual assertion of truth about reality does not escape the cognitive problems. Witnesses may be true witnesses or false witnesses. Their efforts may point in the direction intended or not, and they may point in the true direction adequately or inadequately.

To say that the Bible is God's revelation is to say that what the Bible teaches and attests was breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16) and had no mere human origination (2 Pet. 1:20-21). These passages rule out a view that the Bible is a book which originated with man and is simply used by the Spirit to achieve redemptive ends in spite of its human weaknesses. The Bible's teaching is from above as God guided the thinking of the authors by all the available providential means and in addition gave special information about His inner purpose of salvation by grace through faith based on the atonement, and all the implications of His purposes with His people.

The divine origin and human adaptation of God's Word to man's thought can best be illustrated, again, in the incarnation. The unlimited Son enjoying all the benefits of the Father's immediate presence chose to leave those privileges behind and to limit the use of His powers while existing as a human being. While limited, He was without sin. Similarly, the Bible is limited, without error. Large as it is, it does not contain all of God's infinite knowledge. Knowledge in part is, nevertheless, still knowledge.

Within the human frame of reference and the limitations of human language, Christ emphasized the relationship between content and power. To a Jewish audience He said, "If you hold my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). The freedom was experienced because of the teaching. Jesus could say, "The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe" (John 6:63-64). To receive eternal life by knowing God and Christ (John 17:3) is to know Christ's words which came from the Father. "I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me" (John 17:8). Belief in the assertion that Jesus is from above is necessary to trust in the Person. In prayer Jesus continued to show the importance of truth, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). The object of faith is the person of Christ, but also the doctrine that He is God's Son and the words He taught.

The adaptation of Christ to a human body did not involve sin, and the adaptation of Christ's teachings to human concepts did not involve error. Berkouwer recognizes this when he notes that Jesus chose not to be consciously aware of the time of His second coming, but Berkouwer is "not the least prepared

to speak of an error by Christ."⁸² If Jesus' use of language and limitation of content for a particular time and place do not imply error, these human limitations in general do not constitute evidence against the Bible's inerrancy throughout.

Inscripturated truth, like incarnated truth, adapts itself to historical circumstances in an evident progressive revelation. If the revelation did not adapt itself to cultural levels, it would be unhistorical and anachronistic. The later revelation, however, does not destroy the earlier, but carries it through to completion (Matt. 5:17-18). The validity of the new element that divine revelation introduces, however, is not determined by the situation. As J. Spykman explained, "adapting itself to the existing level and addressing itself to its needs, it shapes man's understanding, rather than being shaped by it. . . . It is not exhaustive. It is nevertheless adequate and free of accommodational misrepresentation."⁸³

One can adapt the teaching of Scripture to children without misrepresenting the teaching of Scripture to them. One can utilize parables to illustrate the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus did, without teaching error about the kingdom of heaven. One can utilize anthropomorphisms in speaking about God as spirit without teaching that God has flesh and bones. Again, one can teach about the origin of the world and nature in ordinary language of the appearance to the human eye without technical instruments without teaching error about the way it looks through a telescope. Jesus did not accommodate Himself to the errors of His day, though He adapted Himself to the level of understanding of his hearers. The prophets adapted the teaching of their message to the people of their times but did not teach the errors of pagan religions surrounding them in the process. Adaptation? Yes. Error? No.

Considerable attention was devoted to the cosmic and anthropic aspects of revelation in Bernard Ramm's *Special Revelation and the Word of God*. As the incomprehensible God reveals Himself to concrete specific men at particular times in the world, Ramm insists, "there is no loss of truth because revelation has this cosmic mediated form."⁸⁴ Conceptual truth, even of unique, once for all events, is always and everywhere true. If "Caesar crossed the Rubicon," was ever true, it remains as true today as it was the day the event occurred. Divine revelation originates with God and God uses the conceptual, historical framework of men to convey His propositional or conceptual truth.

Conceptual truth is not the brittle, inflexible thing often imagined. In Scripture it infrequently appears in the form "S is P." God is spirit (John 4:24). God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15). God is love (1 John 4:8). "I am the way--and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Even this form conveys rich and living significance. Propositional content more often lies buried

⁸²G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, p. 177.

⁸³J. Spykman, "Accommodation," ed. Edwin A. Palmer, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, (Wilmington, Delaware: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1964) I, p. 43.

⁸⁴Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 36.

in literary, historical, and poetic forms; "nevertheless, out of the process of mining and smelting the knowledge of God may be cast in discursive form."⁸⁵ Conceptual thought can designate visible objects, mental states, time sequences, changeless principles, volitional purposes, emotional feelings, and loving personal relationships.

Often propositional content receives unfortunate portrayals as inconsistent with personal relationships. Against that specious disjunction, Bernard Ramm argues,

What does it mean to disclose a Person? Certainly two people who are deaf, blind, and mute can hardly have any real encounter with each other apart from touch. Real encounter in life between persons is always within the context of mutual knowledge. This mutual knowledge is not opposed to the encounter, but it is its indispensable instrument.⁸⁶

The Human Authors' Research and Writing Were Done Under Supernatural Supervision

Often it is said that the doctrine of inspiration asserts something about the reliability or usefulness of the end product (the Bible), but of the process by which the Holy Spirit worked with the writers we know very little. Even those who say this, however, later assert something about the process. Increasingly they are saying that it was not an extraordinary supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit, but an ordinary, providential ministry common to all believers, such as His teaching and filling.

If today the misleading term 'inspiration' is to be used at all, it must certainly now be understood in the sense of that later theory of inspiration which conceives the activity of the divine Spirit as a miracle limited to certain particular acts of writing on the part of an apostle or biblical author.⁸⁷

Küng has missed the emphasis upon providential preparation prior to this in his research and as if he is innovating a point adds, "Not only the recording, but the whole pre-history and post-history of the writing, the whole process of acceptance in faith and transmission of the message, all these have something to do with the divine Spirit." The usual activity of the Spirit does not rule out the need for this special, miraculous operations, however properly understood, Küng goes on to say, "this process can be described as Spirit-pervaded and Spirit-filled."⁸⁸ Küng proceeds to deny that the Scriptures are divine revelation and considers them merely human testimonies to revelatory

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 159.

⁸⁷ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, p. 465.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

experiences. However, it seems supernatural when a sinner reads the Bible with all of its human shortcomings and mistakes, concealment, limitations, and errors, and "in a wholly unmechanical way turns the documents themselves into Spirit-filled and Spirit-pervaded testimonies."⁸⁹

Berkouwer similarly rejects a supernatural activity of Spirit in inspiration of the biblical writers. "God's Word has not come to us as a stupendous miracle that shies away from every link with the human order thus to be truly divine. Rather, when God speaks, human voices ring in our ears."⁹⁰ God's miracles often utilized human and natural means in an extraordinary way, one might remind himself here. "It would be a mistake to formulate a supernaturalistic and mechanical theory of inspiration merely. . . ."⁹¹ Of course no one proposes a mechanical theory for acceptance. Surely the extraordinary activity of God need not all be dismissed as mechanical. Berkouwer sees a trend giving "growing attention to the 'horizontal' of the genuinely human, to man's initiative and activity" explained in part by "a growing aversion to so-called supernaturalism which naively implied incidental and fragmentary 'supernatural' acts of God in 'nature.'"⁹²

We need not see the supernatural work of God's Spirit as isolated, but as an essential part of the dramatic program for counteracting the power of evil. The majority of miracles in Scripture occurred during times of crisis. Clusters of miracles happened as Moses led the people out of Egyptian slavery, as Elijah and Elisha defeated the Baal prophets, as Christ ministered and atoned for sin, and as apostles planted the church.⁹³ The revelation and inspiration occurs in this same historical context for similar purposes of preserving and enhancing God's redemptive program.

Neither need we see the supernatural work of God's Spirit in a mechanical way eliminating the humanness of the writers. Some miracles were done without the use of any temporal factors, as the healing of the Centurion's servant at a distance by Christ's word (Matt. 8:5-13). Others, like the blind man, were healed through an unusual use of means as mud and saliva were put on his eyes and he washed in the pool of Siloam (John 9:6-7). The supernatural in inspiration is not dictation apart from means, but the extraordinary use of such means as human research (Luke 1:1-4), human memory (of events in the life of Christ), and human judgment (of Paul) (1 Cor. 7:25), so that what was written conformed to God's mind on the subject and did not teach error of fact, doctrine or judgment.

A miraculous act at the conception of Christ utilized a fully human woman in an extraordinary way so that the child born of her could be called the holy one, the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Similarly a miracle at the conception of

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 467.

⁹⁰ G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, p. 145.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 150.

⁹² Ibid., p. 151.

⁹³ Gordon R. Lewis, *Judge for Yourself* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974), pp. 46-60.

the human word did not bypass authors, but brought forth from them, holy Scripture, the Word of God.

All believers are indwelt, taught, and filled with the Spirit, only the writers of Scripture are said to be inspired by the Spirit. The writers had the ministries of the Spirit common to all the people of God, but in addition they had the special supervision of the Spirit as prophetic and apostolic spokesmen in their work of composing and writing books of the Bible. The unique authority enjoyed by the prophets and apostles by their peers was not common to all the people who witnessed to their justification by faith. Our doctrine of inspiration should reflect something of that unique delegated, veracious, and special inspired authority.

As we think of the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity working with the persons who wrote Scripture, we must avoid not only mechanical analogies but also what I have called the "single cause fallacy." Some imagine that if God does something, then human beings do nothing in relation to it, or if they do something, then God does not. In many occurrences in history there are multiple causes. In the salvation of souls there are often many factors on the human level as well as the divine gift of new life. In inspiration we have not merely a divine cause or a human cause, but a divine-human concursive operation.

If we must have a model, I suggest one from management--getting things done through people. It involves at least four steps: (1) planning, (2) leading, (3) organizing, and (4) controlling. I suggest that God is the wise and skilled manager who gets the Bible written through prophets and apostles. He planned for them from before the foundation of the world, led in the development of their personalities and styles through His providential operations in the world, and organized their distinctive contributions to produce a book that could make a believer thoroughly equipped for every good work. He controlled the entire process of research, recall, and writing so that they conveyed the truth He wanted taught. In His work of providence God can prevent evil from occurring, and *a fortiori* in His work of inspiration He can prevent errors of fact, thought or judgment from corrupting His inscripturated Word. God is far more effective than the most effective human manager who accomplishes his objectives through people.

To change the analogy, but keep it in the realm of loving human relationships, a good pastor achieves certain foreknown objectives through his people without reducing them to robots. A good parent can guide children to certain desirable goals without destroying their wills. And a good teacher can lead a class to fulfill certain purposes in a course without simply dictating answers. If human parents, pastors, and teachers can get things done through people without a mechanical dictation, how much more can the all-wise God!

Charles Hodge has well said,

If God without interfering with a man's free agency can make it infallibly certain that he will repent and believe (and that seems to be what even non-Calvinists are now saying they mean by the witness of the Spirit in the

Scriptures), He can render it certain that he will not err in his teaching. It is in vain to profess to hold the common doctrine of theism, and yet assert that God cannot control rational creatures without turning them into machines.⁹⁴

The Scriptures themselves explicitly acknowledge the activity of men under the Spirit's control. "David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared. . . ." (Mark 12:36). Peter said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David. . . ." (Acts 1:16). According to Paul, "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to you ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet. . . ." (Acts 28:28). Luke was fully free to investigate previous attempts to write-up accounts of Jesus' deeds (Luke 1:1-4). It is simply suggested that superintending all of this research was the Spirit who kept him from including anything false about the life and teaching of the Lord and guided him in including the things God wanted written. This view recognizes the fact that Paul may have to speak on issues concerning which he has no quotation from the Savior, but holds that as Paul made his judgment, he did so under the control of divine inspiration (1 Cor. 7:25), and consequently his judgments are "the Lord's command" (1 Cor. 14:37).

How did the Holy Spirit do this? How does one person influence another? Why do some have a more effective impact on people than others? Undoubtedly there are many factors involved and the Scriptures provide little in the way of answers to questions of "how." How God guides people providentially, or how He answers prayer, or how the Spirit regenerates we are not told in detail. We should not be surprised, then, that we are not told more about how the Holy Spirit inspired providentially prepared spokesmen to write what He wanted written.

However, we do know several things about the process: (1) We know that the Holy Spirit so specially controls their judgment that what they write is God's judgment on the issue. (2) We do know that apart from a supernatural control that finite and fallen men could not express such authoritative pronouncements without the charge of being presumptuous prophets who claimed to speak a word for God which came merely from their own heart. People were severely punished for this presumption throughout the Old Testament. (3) We do know that the Scripture originated with God's breathing them out and not by the will of man (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). (4) We do know that the divine spokesmen were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). (5) We do know that the Spirit's supervision applied to the written word that would be available after Peter was gone, and that all of the previously written Old Testament and New Testament was viewed as the word of the prophets telling of the power and the coming of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 1:16, 19-21). (6) We do know that the act of the Spirit's inspiration had writing of Scripture as its object, not subsequent readers of Scripture. The process of inspiration cannot be reduced to that of illumination. (7) We do know that all of the Scripture was not given by dictation.

⁹⁴Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1), p. 169.

Since dictation is so frequently alleged to be connected with inerrancy it deserves a further word. Like most persistent views, it contains an element of truth. In a few instances a biblical author heard an audible voice conveying God's message. When Moses "went into the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him" (Num. 7:89); compare Exod. 4:12; 19:3-6; Lev. 1:1; 1 Sam. 3:4-14, 21; Isa. 6:8-9; Rev. 14:13. In some instances there may have been an inward, silent hearing, just as there is a silent speaking toward God (1 Sam. 1:13), but more often there seems to have been a concursive inspiration in which the prophet or apostle actively writes and the Holy Spirit moves along with the speaking and writing in such a manner that the thing spoken or written is also the word of God. Ramm defends these three forms of divine speaking: audible voice, inward hearing, and concursive inspiration.⁹⁵ There is not sufficient evidence to support an audible dictation in every passage, indeed the theory of dictation does not fit the facts such as the differences of style, vocabulary, and personal emphasis.

If brainstorming and serendipity sessions can stimulate creative thinking among people apart from inspiration, how much more could the Holy Spirit suggest and motivate people to write freely and fulfill His ultimate purpose? Augustine spoke of the ineffable power operating within to stimulate ideas in the consciousness. His view of "spiritual suggestion" comes out in exposition of the text, "the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus" (John 13:2).

Such a putting (into the heart) is a spiritual suggestion and entereth not by the ear, but through the thoughts; and thereby not in a way that is corporeal, but spiritual. For what we call spiritual is not always to be understood in a commendatory way. . . . For it is from a spiritual being the spiritual things get their name. But how such things are done, as that devilish suggestions should be introduced, and so mingle with human thoughts that man accounts them his own, how can he know? Nor can we doubt that good suggestions are likewise made by a good spirit in the same unobservable and spiritual way.⁹⁶

CONCLUSION: THE HUMAN AUTHORS' WRITINGS ARE TRULY HUMAN WORDS AND TRULY GOD'S WORDS

The Bible is not merely human words guided by the ordinary operations of the Holy Spirit, as other books by devout writers are human. It is not errant human words functioning to lead people to Christ. It is the word of conceptual truth leading to Christ and faithfulness. Just as the biblical concept of truth has two emphases--reliable information about reality and fidelity to it, so the biblical view of error has two emphases--mistaken

⁹⁵Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God*, p. 59.

⁹⁶Augustine, *Gospel of John* LV, 4; *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* VII, p. 300.

information about what is or ought to be, and unfaithfulness to reality or morality. One cannot displace the other.

For an abundant Christian life a person must avoid both misinformation and unfaithfulness. The Holy Spirit illumines the mind to know what is to be believed and why as objective Christianity. That truth becomes the test of subjective experiences in the heart of a particular believer. The harmony of the objective criteria and the internal witness of the Spirit enabling us to avoid both error and infidelity is beautifully stated by Robert Clyde Johnson. "Just as the Spirit must at all times *attest* the written Word, so the written Word must at all times test the Spirit."⁹⁷

How could the writings of human beings in their situations provide a criterion for determining what spiritual influences are truly of God? They were equipped for this awesome task not only by all the ordinary ministries of the Spirit, but by reason of their special gifts as prophets and apostles and by the miracle of inspiration. Through these means God has delegated His authority, which is final and ultimate, to men. And by these means He has enabled them to write with a veracious authority. Hence their writings determine the content of distinctively Christian faith and indicate the grounds for both mental assent to the teaching which guides to total trust in the Christ who can save.

The objective validity of any teaching does not compel consent to it. People can withhold assent from truth, as a wife may not believe the guilt of her husband legally established beyond reasonable doubt. People may also withdraw from reality and rebel against moral standards. The ministry of the Spirit in opening minds and hearts to receive the gospel is not diminished by defending its objective truth. Because sinful people naturally choose not to assent to its truth or trust the Christ of whom it speaks, the witness of the Spirit must open their hearts today as He did Lydia's heart in Paul's day (Acts 16:14). But the message remains objectively true whether accepted or not and brings greater condemnation to some, while bringing to others eternal life (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

To affirm that the human words of Scripture adequately convey the divine truth does not suppose any magic or transubstantiation of the words as Berkouwer imagines.⁹⁸ What it does mean is that the teaching of the prophetic and apostolic men conform to God's mind on the subjects of which they write. What they teach us, limited as it is, God teaches us. God has condescended to disclose His nature and changeless purposes for time in human language. As I have set forth in another place, truth is a quality of content, not of mere words. Hence it is the Bible's teaching or verbal content that is inerrant, that is, wholly true.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Robert Clyde Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), p. 56.

⁹⁸G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, p. 146.

⁹⁹Gordon R. Lewis, "What Does Infallibility Mean?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 6 (Winter, 1963), pp. 18-27.

By verbally expressed truth I mean that propositional content that corresponds with the mind of God. How do we know when our human ideas correspond to God's mind? God cannot deny Himself, therefore we know our ideas fail to conform to His when they are involved in self-contradiction. God omnisciently knows all relevant facts on any issue, and hence for human ideas to conform to His, they must fit the facts. God's ideas are furthermore designed to guide human beings to an abundant life sharing His fellowship and work. It follows that our ideas conform to His when they lead to an authentic, fulfilling life in His fellowship and service. Hence the tests of truth involve logical non-contradiction, empirical fit, and existential viability. In affirming that the human words of the Bible are inerrant or true, I am saying that their teaching is non-contradictory, factual, and viable. One who stakes his life upon this teaching will not be disappointed.

What is the chief distinguishing quality of human assertions which may be regarded as divine affirmations, as absolutes? With St. Augustine I suggest that one essential difference between the eternal and the temporal is the difference between the changeless and the changing. He said, "Time does not exist without some movement and transition, while in eternity there is no change."¹⁰⁰ In eternal wisdom God made the world and man. Hence the chief quality of wisdom (*sapientia*) as distinct from knowledge of the changing world (*scientia*) is its changelessness. Any immutable truth is God's truth wherever it may be found, it corresponds with God's changeless mind on the subject.

Knowledge of changeless truths is attained by the intellect created in the image of God for this purpose, as we have seen. Eternal wisdom, Augustine held, is not far from every one of us, for in it we live and move and have our being. Man never has a complete and simultaneous vision of God's mind, and so at best does not see as God sees Himself. While there is no equality of knowing as God knows, man's intellect is enlightened by general and special illumination "in some conformity unto that form which is equal unto Thee."¹⁰¹

All that the Bible teaches is true. It conforms to the reality of what was, is or will be ontologically and what ought or ought not to be ethically. And we know what grace has provided for the redemption of the lost. The salvation of sinners is indeed the central concern of Scripture and should have priority. The redemptive purpose, however, is not enhanced, but hurt, by reducing the Bible to that one objective. People need to know about creation, the origin of sin, the effects of sin upon history, and the purpose of the law. They need to hear of divine judgments upon high and low, Jew and Gentile, great and small nations. Christians need the comfort of changeless truth regarding divine providence in the details of past history and the eschatological triumph to come. All that Scripture affirms is inspired by God. All is true. All is profitable. Unfortunately Boer and Berkouwer want to have the functional values of which the Bible speaks without the consistency and factuality upon which they are based. Berkouwer saw that to be impossible regarding the resurrection. People are to be pitied who imagine that they

¹⁰⁰Augustine, *City of God* XI, 6; *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* II, p. 208.

¹⁰¹Augustine, *Trinity* IX, 11, 16; NPNF III, p. 132.

have the forgiveness of sins if the resurrection of Christ is not more than a human projection of wishful thinking. What is exemplified in relation to the resurrection holds throughout Scripture. The base of the experiential values is inerrant fact. The defense of inerrancy does not displace the functional benefits of Christianity by a dead orthodoxy, it preserves the only base on which the existential significance of the faith can be realized for time and eternity.

To hold the doctrine of biblical inerrancy does not solve all the problems of interpretation. It is not to affirm the inerrancy of the present understanding of the Bible by any believer. It is not always easy to distinguish the teaching about once-for-all irrepeatable events from the teaching about events which can for all practical purposes be repeated. But in struggling to determine the meaning the Spirit intended to convey through the human author, the same three criteria of truth operate. That interpretation is true which without self-contradiction fits all the relevant lines of data from the grammar, context, purpose, historical and cultural settings, and the rest of the Bible's teaching on that subject. On some difficult passages we may not be able to come to a satisfactory resolution, but the interpreter committed to inerrancy need not ask whether in fact he is handling the word of truth. His only question is whether he is interpreting the word of truth in a worthy manner (2 Tim. 2:15).

At stake here is no minor detail of Scripture but (1) the very essence of Christianity. Christianity, as J. Gresham Machen argued, is not mere religious experience as liberalism tended to say. Christianity is life or experience founded on truth, verbally stated truth, doctrinal truth. At stake here is (2) the object of faith for salvation. Is the object of faith as Berkouwer says totally different from knowledge to which we give assent? Is it mere trust in the person of Christ through the witness of the Holy Spirit? Or do we *know* whom we have believed with Paul and are we convinced of the objective truth of the gospel concerning Christ as was Paul in order that we might trust the real Christ who died and rose? (2 Tim. 1:12). Paul puts the issue beyond reasonable interpretative doubt when he writes that anyone who does not continue in the teaching of Christ (*didache*) does not have God (2 John 9). Clearly he means giving assent to the assertion that Jesus has come in the flesh which the deceivers and antichrists have denied (2 John 7; 1 John 4:1-3). He who has this Son, who became flesh and dwelt among us, has life (1 John 5:12). John wrote his gospel not that men might trust an unknown Christ, but that they might give mental assent to the assertion that Jesus is (in reality) the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing (this information) you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

Just as it is indispensable to eternal life to affirm that the truly human Jesus has come in the flesh, so it is crucial to evangelicalism to affirm that the written Word has come in human words. It is not enough to say that the human words point to a Word beyond all human expression. It is not enough to say that the time-bound human words witness to the timeless Word. The confession of the early church was that Jesus is the Christ in true humanity. Analogously the confession of the early church was that the Bible is God's Word in all that it teaches. Many have pointed out that what the Bible says, God says, what the prophet says, God says, what the apostle writes

is God's commandment to the Church. Just as relativism in ethics has changed "is good" to "is considered good" by some in a given time or culture, so Berkouwer exchanges "is God's Word" for "is a first-century (or second-century?) human witness to God's Word." It sounds pious and seems to resolve many critical questions, but the implications of that subtle change are as far reaching as the nature and object of Christian faith, the nature of the message to be presented in missionary outreach, and the nature of Christianity itself.

The particularism of claiming that Christ is the only way to God as Redeemer and of proclaiming that the Bible is the Book written by divine inspiration is indeed offensive to many. But I remind you that there are many books written under the illumination of the Spirit by time-bound, godly people. Is the Bible different only in degree, if that? Or is the Bible unique in that it is the only book ever to be so supernaturally inspired?

The tendency at large today, as in periods of neoplatonism, Hegelianism, and pantheism in the past, is to find God incarnate in everything, not just one person, and to find God's Word in all "sacred" books, not with supreme authority in one book. Surely Berkouwer and his followers do not intend to reduce the Bible to the level of other religious literature, but the view of inspiration, or should I say illumination presented, opens the door to those who would see the Bible as one of many sacred writings pointing beyond its own errancy to an unknown God (in reality).

Biblical quotations of the New Testament are taken from the New International Version and of the Old Testament from the Revised Standard Version.

THE MEANING OF INERRANCY

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PAPER SUMMARY

The defense of the term and doctrine of inerrancy presupposes a clear definition. The aim of this paper is to specify the meaning of the doctrine. To this end, a study of the methodology of theology is undertaken. It is concluded that the method of abduction or retrodution is most appropriate to theology as a whole and should be used in formulating a doctrine of inerrancy. Thus, the phenomena of Scripture are examined, and a definition of the doctrine is formulated in terms of truth or truthfulness. Finally, there is a discussion of qualifications, misunderstandings, and objections.

THE MEANING OF INERRANCY

Paul D. Feinberg*

It appears to me that in Ethics, as in all other philosophical studies, the difficulties and disagreements, of which its history is full, are mainly due to a very simple cause: namely to the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely *what* question it is which you desire to answer.

Principia Ethica, vii.

While G. E. Moore undoubtedly overstates the case for discovering the precise question, he is indeed onto something very important. Without a proper and clear understanding of the question, one has little hope of arriving at the right answer. Moreover, at the heart of a clear and precise understanding of the question is a careful definition of the terms that make up the question. This is particularly true in theological contexts where words and dogma have a long and hoary history. The danger is always that emotions will be aroused but there may fail to be communication of the information desired. All of this is to say that without a precise definition of the word "inerrancy" and the related doctrine of inerrancy, it will be impossible to answer the question whether the Bible is inerrant or not. That such a clear and careful definition would be helpful can be seen by even a superficial reading of the literature that makes up this debate. On both sides of the fence there have been attacks on straw men with the failure to engage one another on the genuine issues. Therefore, the task of this paper is to define both the term and doctrine of inerrancy as precisely as possible so that the debate may genuinely proceed.

However, before turning to my aforementioned task it seems to me that some preliminary considerations are in order. First, I do not intend to defend all who have ever sought to advance a doctrine of inerrancy. Such is both impossible and unnecessary. However, this needs to be emphasized since there are those who have in the past and are now seeking to formulate this doctrine in an indefensible manner. Often such attempts are held up to ridicule and scorn, and *all* who hold to inerrancy are tarred with that same brush. This is not to say that inerrantists have not done similar things, but to emphasize a basic tenet of debate or argumentation. Namely, the excessive and even false claims of some or even all in defense of a position do not show that the position is false. Or to put it another way, a view may be poorly or incorrectly argued but *true*. Therefore, it must be shown that inerrancy in its most defensible formulation is false or at least that it is not as plausible as some other position.

Second, it is often claimed by those who support an inerrant Bible that they alone hold to a high view of Scripture. This illicit the following response from Davis:

*I wish to acknowledge and express appreciation for help in writing this paper to the following people: I had helpful discussions with Mr. William Asdell, Mr. William Custer, and Dr. David Wells. Dr. John S. Feinberg and Dr. Norman L. Geisler read an earlier drafting of this paper and made many helpful suggestions to improve this study.

I will criticize inerrancy, but my purpose is to strengthen--not weaken--the evangelical Christian cause by making a clear and, I hope, convincing case for an evangelical attitude toward the Bible that does not involve inerrancy. The "all or nothing" arguments of many defenders of inerrancy give the impression that there is no middle ground between inerrancy, on the one hand, and neo-orthodox, liberal, or even atheistic attitudes toward the Bible, on the other.¹

Davis' quote raises explicitly or implicitly at least three distinct but related questions. (1) Are there only two possible positions on Scripture? One must hold to either (a) inerrancy, or (b) neo-orthodox, liberal, or atheistic attitudes toward the Bible. The answer to this question is easy. There are many possible attitudes toward Scripture. (2) What is the criterion(a) for a "high view of Scripture?" Or put another way, is inerrancy a necessary or sufficient condition, or both, for a high view of Scripture? The answer to this question is not easy. I would guess that there would be disagreement on the answer among evangelicals. Fortunately, it is not necessary for us to answer this question for this paper. (3) Given the criterion(a) for a "high view of Scripture," do any of the many possibilities mentioned in (1) qualify? Obviously, the answer to this question awaits some definitive answer to question (2), which we have not attempted. But again this is not the question before us.

Third, it is again claimed by some who defend an inerrant Bible that forfeiture of the doctrine of inerrancy leads *inevitably* to the denial of other doctrines that are central to the Christian faith. This, of course, is not necessarily true, although there are numerous examples that can be cited where this has in fact taken place. A correct doctrine of Scripture is not an *absolute* hedge against defection. There are cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses that have as a part of their doctrinal statement an excellent position on Scripture. On the other hand, there are those who have vigorously opposed an inerrant Bible but have remained orthodox elsewhere in doctrine. Having said this, we have not settled the matter, since it would surely seem that the *first* step toward doctrinal purity would be a correct doctrine of Scripture. But it hardly goes without saying that there are many, even among the highly educated, who hold views for which they cannot give adequate justification. Thus, the question that we are addressing ourselves to, is not an unimportant or insignificant one. It cuts to the heart and foundation of Christian theology. It is the question of theological consistency.

The aim, then, of this paper is to give the meaning or definition of the doctrine of inerrancy. I shall follow this course. I shall begin with a discussion of the method in which a doctrine is constructed or formed. Then the phenomena of Scripture which bear on the doctrine will be examined. This will be followed by a search for terminology and a doctrine which best suits the scriptural phenomena with special attention being given to qualifications and misunderstandings. Finally, I shall reply to some important objections

¹Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 20-21.

which might be raised to inerrancy but which have not been treated in the course of the study.

THE PROBLEM OF METHOD

Where does the theologian begin his effort to set forth the meaning of inerrancy? One possible answer might be a good dictionary such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. If we were merely trying to define the word "inerrancy," that suggestion would not be without merit. However, we are attempting to do more than merely define a *term*; we are seeking to define or formulate a *doctrine*. This task takes us to a most fundamental inquiry, a discussion of theological method. That is, how does the theologian go about formulating or constructing doctrine? How does the theologian theologize? Indeed, it has not been uncommon to set the whole inerrancy conflict in the context of a debate over method. Just such a case in point is Beegle's treatment in *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*.²

Beegle begins by distinguishing between deductive and inductive methodology. While every argument involves the claim that its premises provide evidence for the truth of its conclusion, deduction and induction differ in the nature of their premises and the relationship between the premises and the conclusion. In deduction the premises are *general* assumptions or propositions from which *particular* conclusions are derived. Furthermore, a deductive argument involves the claim that its premises *guarantee* the truth of its conclusion. Where the premises are both the necessary and sufficient condition for the truth of the conclusion, the argument is said to be valid. Where the premises fail to provide the aforementioned evidence, the argument is said to be invalid.³

With induction, on the other hand, the relationship between premises and conclusion is much more modest. The premises only provide *some* evidence for the conclusion. Inductive arguments are not valid or invalid. They are better or worse, depending on the degree of probability which their premises confer upon their conclusions. Moreover, in induction the premises are *particulars*, and the conclusions are *generalizations*, the data being organized under the most general categories possible.⁴

Which of these methodologies is correct? Well, Beegle says that they are complimentary. That is, both are needed. However, this is not the end of the matter. There is, he thinks, a priority to the inductive. To illustrate this contention, he discusses the way in which an archaeologist would go about excavating a *tell*. The primary task is to dig down through the strata and to label each item that is found as to its stratum. After having thoroughly excavated and labeled the objects, then the archaeologist will examine some group of objects like pottery from a single stratum. As he correlates the

²Dewey Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

³Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 20-21.

⁴Ibid.

characteristics of a level, he will find that the pottery has a certain form and other features that distinguish it from pottery in other strata. Thus, he finds that each stratum has its own type or class of pottery. This classification is called "stratigraphy."⁵ Now it is true that when the archaeologist goes to the next *tell*, he does not follow quite the same process. Having already derived from the previously discovered phenomena a classification system, he will immediately assign a piece of pottery to a period or type. However, even here induction has a part. If, for instance, other factors begin to call into question the original classification system, there will be the need for revision. Therefore, Beegle can conclude, "The best results are obtained when induction precedes deduction."⁶

Beegle now applies this to the problem of inerrancy. Those who defend inerrancy are deductivists pure and simple. They begin with certain assumptions about God and the Scriptures, namely that God cannot lie and the Scriptures are the Word of God. From these assumptions inerrantists deduce that the Bible is without error. This approach leads to an *a priori* determined conclusion, dogmatism, and a disregard for the phenomena of Scripture. Regardless of the problem of the phenomena, the inerrantist stubbornly maintains his stance on Scripture.⁷

On the other hand, the inductivist cannot accept inerrancy. He begins with the phenomena of Scripture. There he finds errors of differing kinds. He comes across historical inaccuracies. Further, there is reflected in the Bible a view of the world that is scientifically unacceptable today. And this is just the beginning. Thus, as the errantist seeks to build a doctrine of Scripture, he must be true to the facts of the case. Therefore, try as he may, he cannot accept an inerrant Bible.⁸

Is this picture fair to the methodology of all defenders of inerrancy? I think not. There is no monolithic methodology employed by inerrantists. In R. C. Sproul's excellent chapter, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," he describes at least three general approaches to the problem of method. First, he cites the confessional method by which the Bible is confessed to be the Word of God but it is so recognized by faith alone. An exponent of this method is G. C. Berkouwer. Second, there is the presuppositional method of Cornelius Van Til. The proper method of defending the authority and inerrancy of the Bible is a method which includes the idea of the absolute authority and inerrancy of the Scripture in its foundational premise. The Bible is self-attesting. Finally, there is the classical method which is both deductive and inductive, interested in external as well as internal evidence.⁹

⁵Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*, p. 16.

⁶Ibid., p. 17.

⁷Ibid., pp. 175-224.

⁸Ibid.

⁹R. C. Sproul, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), pp. 242-261.

Given that there are at least these three general approaches, Beegle is wrong in lumping all attempts to defend inerrancy into the deductivist camp. There is more, however, that can and should be said. Even those that do advocate a deductive methodology should not be so easily charged with dogmatism and close-mindedness. For some, their theological *a priori*s are justified indirectly. Their proof is much like that used to justify the axioms of a geometric system. Since the axioms are so basic, it is claimed they cannot be proven in terms of anything more basic. Thus, the axioms are justified indirectly in terms of the theorems, etc. which they generate, and the solutions which they make possible. At any rate, while it is *a priori*, such a methodology is concerned with the facts in some sense, and, as such, should not be called dogmatic.

This is not the end of the matter however. The question still remains as to the correct method of formulating or constructing a doctrine (i.e., giving the meaning of the doctrine). It seems to me that the question of methodology with respect to inerrancy cannot be divorced from the broader considerations of a general methodology for theology.¹⁰ Unfortunately, evangelicals do not usually discuss the matter of methodology as they are generally more interested in content of theology. There are, however, two very helpful articles by evangelicals on theological methodology. They are Arthur F. Holmes', "Ordinary Language Analysis and Theological Method,"¹¹ and John Warwick Montgomery's, "The Theologian's Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology."¹² Interestingly enough, there is a good measure of agreement between the two men. Both deny that either deduction or induction alone is the method of the theologian. Holmes is most critical of the independent use of either methodology. Deduction is the logic of mathematics. If theology were circumscribed to this logic, (1) theological thought would have to be formalized into a deductive argument, (2) the historical narratives would merely be illustrative, (3) analogy, metaphor, symbol, and poetry in the Bible would all have to be restated in logical univocal, universal form, and

¹⁰One might with some justification argue that the doctrine of Scripture is foundational. From this foundation which is theory neutral one has reasons for higher order beliefs. One can see a recent exposition of this view called foundationalism in the work of John L. Pollock, *Knowledge and Justification* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974). More recently, the picture that philosophers (particularly philosophers of science) have painted is quite different. At the heart of the change is the recognition that there is no such thing as theory neutral experience; theory is operative at all levels. The importance of the point for the theologian is that theoretical considerations are work in all levels of his task, yes, even at the level of hermeneutics and exegesis. Much more could be said but a good source for studying what has been said is *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, ed. Frederick Suppe, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

¹¹Arthur F. Holmes, "Ordinary Language Analysis and Theological Method," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XI (Summer 1968), pp. 131-138.

¹²John Warwick Montgomery, "The Theologians Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology," *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970), pp. 267-313.

(4) all events in redemptive history as well as their application of grace would become logically necessary.¹³

Induction, on the other hand, comes in three forms. First, there is Aristotelian induction which sought through intuitive abstraction of familiar categorized data to arrive at universal principles. Such a method presupposes and would tie theology to an Aristotelian view of nature and man. Second, there is the induction of Bacon and Mill which is concerned with the experimental identification of causes. This approach is hardly suited to theology. Finally, a loose approximation of Aristotle's search for general concepts based upon observation of empirical data is rejected on two grounds. A complete induction is impossible, and in practice this is not the way the theologian proceeds.¹⁴

Theological method is best described by the complementary use of both induction and deduction. For Montgomery this is called *abduction* or *retroduction* after Peirce's terminology,¹⁵ although the idea can be found as early as Aristotle.¹⁶ On the other hand, Holmes calls his method *adduction*.¹⁷ The slight difference in terminology notwithstanding both men expound a similar methodology. While both induction and deduction are employed, there is no easy formula for the combination of the two. The theologian will use one method here and the other there. The analogue is to be found in theory construction or formation in science. The theory is not created strictly by induction from some data or phenomena nor by deduction from some first principles. Yet both induction and deduction operate in the imagination of the scientist so that a theory is born. The same general method is true in the theology. The theologian does deal with the relationship between certain propositions, leading him to make deductive inferences. At the same time, he develops doctrine from his understanding of the scriptural phenomena. Thus, both induction and deduction cooperate in theologizing.¹⁸

Montgomery gives a helpful example of the operation of abduction or retroduction in science. He cites the story of James Watson and Francis Crick who discovered the molecular structure of DNA. Watson was convinced by reasons based on

¹³Holmes, "Ordinary Language Analysis," p. 133.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁵C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Harvard ed., 5.146; 5.171; 5.189; and 5.274, cf. 5.276.

¹⁶Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, ii.25; cf. *Posterior Analytics*, ii.19.

¹⁷Holmes, "Ordinary Language Analysis," p. 135ff.

¹⁸Ibid., Montgomery, "The Theologians Craft," pp. 276-279. For further references to the method see the following: Suppe, *Structure of Scientific Theories*; Mary Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961); Stephen Toulmin, *Foresight and Understanding* (Hutchinson University Library, 1961); Norwood Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958); Ian Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964) and *Religion and Science*; Frederick Ferre, "Mapping the Logic of Models in Science and Theology," *The Christian Scholar*, XLVI (1963), pp. 9ff.

genetics that the structure of DNA had to be built around two spirals. The key question was the arrangement of the two spirals. They built a model and tirelessly sought to rearrange the spirals in such a way as to get it to work. One night Crick had a revelation given him by intuition. The two spirals had to be symmetrical, they coiled in opposite directions, one top to bottom and the other bottom to top. This theory seemed to reflect certain laws of crystallography. It was true! The thing that is noteworthy is that both induction and deduction are at work, but as said before in no easy combination.¹⁹

The one point of difference between Montgomery and Holmes is that Montgomery says nothing about a doctrine of Scripture being formulated by this method. As a matter of fact, he seems to think that such a doctrine is a part of the data, outside of or before theologizing.²⁰

On the other hand, Holmes is explicit that a doctrine of inerrancy is a product of this methodology. In about one page at the end of his article he sketches his view.²¹ In a reply to Holmes, Geisler objects to Holmes' treatment of the doctrine of inerrancy on two grounds: (1) the inadequacy of the bases for rejecting induction and deduction, and (2) a discomfort with adduction as outlined by Holmes. Geisler concludes by arguing for a methodology that proceeds *inductively* to premises about the inspiration of the Bible guaranteeing that what it teaches is true and about the fact that the Bible teaches historical, factual, etc., material. Then, from these premises it *deduces* that the Scripture is without error in matters of history and so on.²²

I suspect that there is greater agreement between Holmes and Geisler than a first reading of the exchange might indicate. I think that a good deal of Geisler's concern is motivated by Holmes' unfortunate use in his brief sketch of such terms as "extrapolation to round out the doctrine of Scripture," "a model," "a word game," and the incorrect characterization of the doctrine of inerrancy as a "second-order theological construct." Theologizing is all based on the text of Scripture, and is not identical with it. In my judgment there is Scripture and theologizing upon it.²³

On the other hand, I guess that Holmes' objection to Geisler's suggestion is that he cannot derive his conclusion without equivocation. This is due to the fact that the propositions from which inerrancy is deduced must be so loaded that the fallacy of equivocation is inevitable.²⁴

¹⁹Montgomery, "The Theologians Craft," pp. 272-273.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 283-288.

²¹Holmes, "Ordinary Language Analysis," pp. 137-138.

²²Norman L. Geisler, "Theological Method and Inerrancy: A Reply to Professor Holmes," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XI (Summer 1968), pp. 139-146. See also A. F. Holmes, "Reply to N. L. Geisler," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Society*, XI (Fall 1968), pp. 194, 195.

²³See footnote 18 for arguments to this effect.

²⁴Holmes, "Ordinary Language Analysis," p. 137.

There is, however, a deep point of agreement between Geisler (and those who defend the classical method) and Holmes or Montgomery. This point of agreement is the need for the combined methods of induction and deduction, although admittedly they would not relate them in the same way.

There are, in my judgment, a number of advantages in formulating the doctrine of inerrancy by abduction or retroduction. They are: (1) It retains a methodological continuity with the rest of theology. If Holmes and Montgomery are right about retroduction being the correct method for theology, then it is difficult without some argument to see why the doctrine of inerrancy should be methodologically different. (2) It retains both induction and deduction so that neither logic of the classical method is lost. (3) It places the justification of the doctrine of inerrancy on a broader evidential base. In the next section I shall examine the phenomena of Scripture which serve as the evidential justification for the doctrine of inerrancy. These considerations are more numerous than an inductive argument to two premises from which inerrancy is deduced. (4) The conclusion of a retroductive argument is much more difficult to disconfirm than that of the classical argument. This point can be illustrated in the distinction made by N. R. Hanson between pattern statements (result of abduction) and detail statements (results of induction alone):

Pattern statements are different from detail statements. They are not inductive summaries of detail statements. Still the statement, "It is a bird" is truly empirical. Had birds been different, or had the bird-antelope been drawn differently, "It is a bird" might not have been true. In some sense it is true. If the detail statements are empirical, the pattern statements which give them sense are also empirical--though not in the same way. *To deny a detail statement is to do something within the pattern. To deny a pattern statement is to attack the conceptual framework itself, and this denial cannot function in the same way . . .*²⁵ (Italics are mine).

If Hanson is correct, and I think that he is, then concern about the certainty of the conclusion in retroduction is unnecessary. It should be remembered that the first steps in the logic of the classical method are inductive, so that the conclusion that is deduced is only from *probable* premises. (5) It gives a rationale as to why a defender of inerrancy might be justified in holding and defending the doctrine of inerrancy in spite of problems with some of the phenomena. A helpful analogue can be drawn from theory formulation in science. No scientific theory is without anomalies. However, these anomalies do not immediately disconfirm the theory, if that theory fits most of the data. Rather, they show that the phenomena are not fully understood or the theory needs further amplification. The same is true with the defender of inerrancy. Because the doctrine makes intelligible so much of the phenomena, the theologian works both with phenomena and doctrine to resolve the conflict. Such a procedure removes the doctrine of inerrancy from what some have called the "maginot-line mentality." The inerrantist can live with difficulties,

²⁵Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery*, pp. 87-90.

knowing that one anomaly will not disconfirm or falsify his doctrine. This is as it should be since the inerrantist only claims that when all things are known, there will be no conflict between doctrine and data. (6) It retains an important distinction between the Scripture and interpretations (hermeneutics/exegesis) and theologizing (biblical and systematic theology) on it. It is the Bible that is inerrant, neither our interpretations nor theologizing are infallible. Finally, (7) if the point made in (6) is correct, then it leaves open the possibility that a better formulation of a doctrine may be made. This is not to deny that the phenomena and norms or models are primarily found in the Scripture. However, retrodution does allow that some better way of setting forth the biblical data may be possible and can be sought. It does not mean that subjectivism and relativism are the rule of the day.

In closing my discussion of method one final word is in order. I am not unduly optimistic that there will be agreement on methodology. This discussion touches too deeply theological and apologetical concerns where evangelicals differ widely in approach. However, it is important to notice that, while there is diversity in method, there is unity with respect to the place and importance of Scripture.

THE PHENOMENA OF SCRIPTURE

In my judgment, the phenomena from which the doctrine of inerrancy is built are as follows:

The Biblical Teaching on Inspiration

The importance of the doctrine of inspiration to inerrancy cannot be overestimated. As a matter of fact, until the last century one was thought to be identical with the other. To deny inerrancy was to deny inspiration as well. Clearly, the central passage for consideration here is 2 Timothy 3:16. While all parties to the debate recognize the importance of this verse to the doctrine, it is amazing how few actually do exegesis of this passage.

In the interpretation of this passage there are four distinct but not unrelated questions. The first has to do with the meaning of *pasa graphē* (πᾶσα γραφή). The *pasa* may be translated by either "all" or "every." The distinction between "all Scripture" and "every Scripture" is the difference between reference to the whole body of the Old Testament (cf. Gal. 3:8) and particular passages of Scripture (cf. Acts 8:35). It is the distinction between Scripture viewed collectively and Scripture taken distributively. Some argue emphatically for "every" on the ground that the article is absent. Others point to analogous cases where the *pas* is used in a technical or semi-technical phrase and where "every" cannot possibly be meant (Acts 2:36; Eph. 2:21, 3:15; Col. 4:12). It may, however, be that in these exceptions attention is being drawn to the partitive aspect of the expression. If so, then "every" word would be preferable, and the present phrase would indicate that each separate part of the *graphe* is being viewed.²⁶

²⁶Don Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 1963.

There are three possible meanings for the *graphe*: it could mean any writing whatsoever, since the word simply means "writing;" it may refer to the Old Testament, in *toto* or in part; or it may be construed to include even recent Christian literature. It is highly unlikely that the first possibility is correct. The word *graphe* is to be found over 50 times in the New Testament and it always means one thing, the sacred writings. Some have concluded that it has become a kind of *terminus technicus* for the sacred writings. Thus, if this occurrence only referred to some writing, it would constitute the sole exception. It might be objected, however, such an exception is justified, since every other instance of the use of *graphe* has the definite article (*he graphe, hai graphai*). The answer to that objection is that the absence of the article is due to the fact that the word has attained the status of a specialized term. With only one denotation it can be used without the article, and the absence of the article here indicates this.²⁷

The second issue has to do with the meaning of *theopneustos* (θεόπνευστος). The importance of this word to any discussion of Scripture is decisive in my judgment. *Theopneustos* is a member of a special class of adjectives called verbal adjectives. A group of these are formed by suffixing *-tos*. Further, the word before us is a compound of *theos* (god) and *pneo* (breathe). The usual translation of the term is "inspired" or "inspiration." "Inspiration" may be a bit misleading since it could convey the idea of God's breath being infused into the word, i.e., energizing it. God does energize his word, but that is not the point here. Adjectives of this class either (1) have the meaning of a perfect passive participle, or (2) express possibility. An example of the former is *agapetos* (ἀγαπητός), beloved; the latter can be seen in *anektos* (ἀνεκτός). The passive sense is far more common.²⁸ Warfield, whose exhaustive and often bypassed analysis has not been matched,²⁹ has concluded after a thorough examination of dozens of words ending in *-eustos* that *theopneustos* has nothing to do with *in*-spiring, but with the production of a sacred, authoritative Scripture. The Scriptures are the spirated breath of God. For this reason, Paul can say that the Scriptures are God's speech (Gal. 3:8, 3; Rom. 9:17). God is the author of what is recorded (Acts 13:32-35), and the entirety of Scripture is the oracle of God (Rom. 3:2). One small point before moving to the next issue. Even if it could be shown that the active idea of breathing in the breath of God into the Scriptures was preferable, a strong view of inspiration would not be hindered just so long as this inspiring took place once for all at the time of the writing of the text. The main thought then would just be that the *graphe* were thoroughly permeated with the breath of God.

The third interpretative matter has to do with the relationship between *graphe* and *theopneustos*. Our text says formally or technically that it is the

²⁷Ed. L. Miller, "Plenary Inspiration and 2 Timothy 3:16," *Lutheran Quarterly*, XVII (February 1965), pp. 57, 58.

²⁸Bruce M. Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, New Edition (Princeton, NJ: Theological Book Agency, 1970), p. 44.

²⁹B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), Chapters 3 and 6.

Scriptures, not the writers, that are inspired or God-breathed.³⁰ This is important since some who defend an errant Bible claim that it is false to assert that the writers of the sacred text never made errors of judgment. It seems quite clear that at least once one erred in what he did, for Paul tells us that he found it necessary to withstand Peter to his face (Gal. 2:11ff.). Furthermore, it is clear that at least three letters, possibly four, were written by the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth. However, only two, possibly three depending whether the "severe letter" was a separate letter and whether it is a part of 2 Corinthians, are preserved in our present canon. Thus, all that is required is that *Scripture* be inspired and that the extent of inspiration be identical with our present canon.

Finally, there is the question as to whether *theopneustos* is to be understood as standing (1) predicatively or (2) attributively to the subject *graphe*. If the former is the case, Paul says, "Every Scripture is inspired." On the other hand, if the latter is correct, then the text should read, "Every inspired Scripture" or "every Scripture which is inspired is also useful for instruction." Both renderings are grammatically possible. However, it seems that the predicative use of *theopneustos* is correct. These considerations are in its favor: (1) in the absence of a verb it seems natural to construe two adjectives (*theopneustos*, "God-breathed," or *ophelimos*, "profitable") in the same manner; (2) the construction of 2 Timothy 3:16 is identical to 1 Timothy 4:4, and there the two adjectives are predicative;³⁰ (3) in an attributive construction we would expect the adjective, in this case *theopneustos*, to appear before the *graphe*; (4) words joined by *καί* are usually understood as linked by the conjunction "and;" (5) finally, the attributive interpretation seems to leave open the possibility that there might be some uninspired *graphe*.³¹

The primary argument in favor of the attributive construction is the supposed emphasis of the passage, which is said to lie not in the concept of inspiration but on the usefulness of Scripture.³² At any rate, it should be noted that the attributive sense does not necessarily lead to uninspired Scriptures as Miller so clearly demonstrates:

At this point I should like to suggest that the implication (namely, that there are some Scriptures which are not inspired) is not necessarily in the passage at all. *Graphe* can mean only three things: If it means any writing in general (which, as we have seen, it seems never to mean in the New Testament), then it is clearly reasonable to assert that only those which are God-inspired are useful for instruction, etc. If it means the authoritative Old Testament and/or Christian literature, then it amounts to a kind of reminder that we are talking, after all, about the Scriptures, that

³⁰Miller, "Plenary Inspiration," p. 59.

³¹Ibid.

³²Martin Dibelius and Haars Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Bultolph and Adela Yarbro (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 120.

is, the inspired writings. To speak, for example of *mortal* man is not necessarily to imply that there is any other kind.³³

What then are the implications of this passage for our concern at hand? First, inspiration is something that has to do with the text of Scripture, surely not with the subjective interiority of the writer.³⁴ Such a view cannot square itself with this text. Second, the Scriptures *are* the very spirated breath of God. The view that the text becomes the Word of God when it speaks to me is once again beyond biblical guidelines. Moreover, I think it is important to reaffirm that both the *form* and the *content* of Scripture are the very Word of God.³⁵ While it is true that we must resist the error of simply identifying the Word of God with an "aggregate of letters and sounds," it is nevertheless *nonsense* to think that you can separate them. The *Word* comes in *words*. Third, the doctrine of inspiration applies to *all* or *every* Scripture. That is, the Scriptures in part and in the whole are God's Word. Note that there is no distinction between those things which are either Christological, salvific or necessary for faith and practice, and those things which are historical, scientific or incidental. Sometimes this distinction is called limited inspiration. It is, however, not biblical. Lloyd-Jones puts the issues well:

For the questions which immediately arise are these:
Who decides what is true? Who decides what is of value?
How can you discriminate between the great facts which are true and those that are false? How can you differentiate between the facts and the teaching? How can you separate this [sic] essential message of the Bible from the background in which it is presented? Not only so, but there is certainly no such division or distinction recognized in the Scripture itself. The whole Bible comes to us and offers itself to us in exactly the same way, and as a whole. There is no hint, no suspicion of a suggestion that parts of it are important and parts are not. All come to us in the same form.³⁶

While it is indeed a large and heavy burden to have to defend the Bible on all points, it is nevertheless necessary! It seems to me that those who could "relieve" us of this task overlook two quite important matters. The first is that it is just impossible to separate the historical from the theological. They thoroughly interpenetrate one another. While the evangelical errantist may want to free us from the burden of defending the historical accuracy of the accounts of Pekah's reign because he cannot believe the accounts, the

³³Miller, "Plenary Inspiration," p. 59.

³⁴Bernard L. Ramm, "Scripture as a Theological Concept," *Review and Expositor*, LXXI (February 1974), pp. 157-158.

³⁵Cf. this view with that of Charles A. Briggs, *The Bible, the Church and Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), p. 91.

³⁶D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Authority* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), p. 35.

unbeliever cannot accept the historical nature of a resurrection. Why defend one and not the other? Certainly, the latter is much more difficult to accept than the former. The second point relates to the consequences of divorcing the historical, etc. and the doctrinal or theological. Suppose for a moment that I am an unbeliever. You have just told me that the Bible has numerous inaccuracies of a historical, scientific, and possibly even ethical nature, but it is absolutely without error in all of these wonderful, unbelievable things about God and heaven. Being a bit cynical, I should respond that you stretch the bounds of credulity in asking me to believe all these things which I have no possible way of confirming in spite of the fact that there are numerous errors in anything that I can confirm. Can you blame me? It seems that our Lord sees more connection between the believability of earthly things and heavenly things (John 3:12) than do those who defend limited inspiration.

Before leaving this discussion of inspiration, there does seem to be at least one serious objection to our using this as such a strong datum in support of the doctrine of inerrancy. It has often been objected that a view such as the one I have been arguing is just too simple or one-sided. The objection is stated in a number of different ways. Sometimes it is argued that the inerrantist is guilty of an error analogous to the Christological error of docetism (the denial of Christ's human body). Others state it in terms of mechanical dictation. They argue that such a view of inspiration and inerrancy must of necessity involve the suspension of the abilities and the word by word dictation of the *graphe*. Still others claim that this overlooks the historical conditioning and human thought forms that must be used to convey the truth of God. Since each formulation of the objection requires a slightly different answer, I should like to reply to each in turn.

Does inerrancy lead to something like docetism? I cannot see how. Some in the inerrancy camp may believe that the Bible came down from heaven on a parachute in a heavenly language inscribed without human hand, but they are both in the minority and wrong. The problem for those who oppose inerrancy arises because they fail to keep the biblical balance between the human and the divine. It should be remembered that it is equally as wrong to over-emphasize the human to the exclusion of the divine, as it is to exalt the divine to the negation of the human. The former can be done quite straightforwardly by denying that the Bible is the Word of God. Or it may be accomplished quite subtly, as when Bloesch suggests that the Bible is not the *immediate* Word of God but rather comes through the human medium.³⁷

The problem here is at its deepest level a misconception about the nature of humanity. Inerrantists often use the analogy of a sinless Christ with an errorless Bible. In Christ you have both the human and the divine without sin. In the Bible you have both the human and the divine without error. Beegle's response to this is instructive. He begins by pointing out two reservations that Warfield gives in citing this analogy. Warfield says that the analogy must not be pressed too far since (1) in Christ you have the hypostatic union, while in inscripturation you have nothing parallel, and

³⁷Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: God, Authority, and Salvation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 74-78.

(2) in Christ the divine and the human unite to constitute a divine-human *person*, but in Scripture they only cooperate to produce a divine-human *work*. Then, he quotes Vawter approvingly to the effect that the analogy between sin and errorlessness breaks down because sin is a disorder in man which error is not.³⁸ Furthermore, in another place Beegle declares that there is nothing that is more consistently human than to err. But what both Beegle and Vawter do not realize is that their claim is not strong enough. For the human element in the Scripture to necessitate errors in the text of the Bible, it must be shown that errancy is essential to humanity. If so, then Adam was not human until he erred, and we shall not be human in the glorified state since we shall no longer sin or err. Thus, while care must be used in pressing the analogy between Christ and the Scripture, it does show the *possibility* of an inerrant Bible, given the essential nature of humanity. Inerrancy becomes *necessary* due to the divine element.

Does inerrancy demand mechanical dictation? Those who oppose the doctrine seek to push inerrantists into this mold, but this is unnecessary. I think that the proper way to express the biblical teaching on the process that produced the inspired texts is *concurrence*. That is, God and man so unite that the product is God's word in human language. The author's style and personality are evident in the autographs, as well as the distinctive characteristics of the language in which he wrote. How could this be done? The closest one can come to an answer is to be found in 2 Peter 1:21, but beyond that it must be admitted that what took place was a miracle just like the virgin birth.

Finally, do historical conditioning or context and human thought forms count against inerrancy? Not unless historical conditioning and human thought forms and language *necessarily* falsify truth or God's truth. I have not seen and do not expect to see such a proof. I shall have somewhat more to say about this below.

The Biblical Teaching Concerning the Accreditation of God's Message and Messenger

The second aspect of the biblical data to which the doctrine of inerrancy should appeal is to the criteria set down in Scripture for the accreditation of the prophet and his message. I think that this is second only to the biblical teaching on inspiration, and has not been used as it should have been. There is a good parallel between the prophet and the Scripture. In one the communication is usually verbal, although it could be written down either at the time of reception or later; in the other it is written. Further, in both cases the communication has an essential part the human element.

There are two passages in the book of Deuteronomy that bear on the subject, Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:20-22. There are in these passages three criteria for accreditation: (1) The prophet must not speak in the name of another god (Deut. 13:1, 2; 18:20). This is obviously the easy case to distinguish. The criminal nature of this type of false prophecy is seen in the imposition of capital punishment for the offender. This prophet was guilty of breaking

³⁸ Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*, pp. 289-290.

the first commandment and was thus deserving of death. (2) The prophet must not speak a word that is not true (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:22). We now come to the more difficult case. The prophet does not speak in the name of a false god, but uses his own words claiming that they are God's. This and the following criterion distinguish what is God's Word from that which is the prophet's. In 18:22, "the word that is not true" is literally "the word is not." The point is that the word has no substance or that it is not so. "That is, the word supposedly spoken by God through the prophet was not in accord with the word of God already revealed and it was therefore automatically suspect."³⁹ There had to be harmony within the revealed will of God. (3) The prophet must not speak what does not come to pass (Deut. 18:22). This criterion has reference to the judgmental or predictive word of the prophet. The truth of his words would be demonstrated in the fulfillment or failure of his words. Note that the prophet is accredited by the *total, absolute* truthfulness of his words.

The Biblical Teaching Concerning Its Own Authority

Evangelicals of all types are anxious to affirm the absolute authority of Scriptures, making this an important consideration. There are obviously many more passages that could be cited,⁴⁰ but I shall only discuss the two most significant in my judgment.

The first passage is to be found in Matthew 5:17-20. It is well-known to those who have followed closely the debate over the Bible. Jesus is pointing out that a righteousness greater than that of the pharisees is necessary for entrance into the kingdom, v. 20. It is in this context that he talks about the authoritative and continuing nature of the law as a standard. He did not come to destroy it, v. 17. Moreover, until every jot and tittle be fulfilled it will be easier for heaven and earth to pass away, v. 18. Thus, the law's authority can be seen in the fact that every minutia will be fulfilled.

The second passage is John 10:34, 35. Here Jesus cites Psalm 82:6 in a disputation with the Jews, after which he says that "Scripture cannot be broken," v. 35. Our Lord here speaks of the absolutely binding nature of the authority of Scripture.

What kind of response do those who oppose inerrancy give? Hubbard has replied as follows. With respect to Matthew 5:17-20 his answer is twofold. First, he says that the context does not support a definition of inerrancy that entails absolute accuracy down to the smallest detail, viz, the iota and the dot. "The heart of the argument, then, is . . . (the) binding, persevering quality of the divine commands that Jesus did not abolish but fulfilled."⁴¹ Second, the strong language in the Sermon on the Mount like "till heaven and earth pass away" and "iota" and "dot" are hyperbole. Of some of the strong language Hubbard says, "A literal interpretation would not only encourage

³⁹*New International Commentary*, Deuteronomy Chapter 18, vs. 2-22.

⁴⁰e.g., Acts 1:16, 3:24, 25; Rom. 9:17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 3:8.

⁴¹David Hubbard, "The Current Tensions: Is There a Way Out?" in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), p. 172.

self-maiming, it would surely limit the number of times that one could discipline himself in temptation."⁴² Thus, the binding or authoritative nature of the law is stressed.

Similar treatment is given to John 10:34, 35. It has to do with authority, not inerrancy. Hubbard says:

Jesus' argument seems to focus on the authority of his citation from Psalm 82:6. The statement "Scripture cannot be broken" is virtually an appeal on his part to what his Jewish opponents also believed. His aim was not to teach them new insights into the authority of Scripture, but rather to remind them of what they believed about the authority and applicability of the Scripture--an authority that made it lawful for him to be called the Son of God.⁴³

I, for myself, am willing to grant Hubbard the point that these passages do not explicitly teach inerrancy nor do they specify what a definition of inerrancy must contain. For instance, inerrancy does not demand statements about iotas and dots. However, Hubbard has left the ball park too early. The game is not yet over. To admit that these passages teach that the Bible is an absolute and binding authority is only to move the question one step backward. The question now before us is this. How can the Scriptures be such an authority? To what must we attribute this property. I guess that we could say that God just willed it so. However, is not a better explanation to be found in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible? I think so. To divorce inerrancy and authority is impossible. I have never been able to understand how one can be justified in claiming *absolute* authority for the Scriptures, and at the same time deny their inerrancy. This seems to me to be the height of epistemological nonsense and confusion.

Let me try to illustrate the point I am making. Suppose that I have an Amtrak railroad schedule. In describing its use to you suppose further that I tell you that it is filled with numerous errors, *but* that it is *absolutely* authoritative and binding on you. I think that you would be amazed. If this be true, at least the Amtrak schedule has this going for it; it says that it is subject to change without notice. There is an objection to the point I am making, and it goes as follows. False in one thing, does not make the Bible false in all the Bible says.⁴⁴ Of course, this is true, but overlooks the significant fact that, if what has been said to this point is true, the Bible is claiming that it is absolutely true. The Amtrak schedule is not. Beegle is aware of this reply. Thus, he says that even if his wife claims to tell the truth but is wrong, that does not mean that everything that she says is false.⁴⁵ Again, what Beegle says is true, but he has overlooked an important fact. The person speaking with respect to the Bible is not his wife but *God*. This is not some

⁴² Ibid., p. 173.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*, pp. 280ff.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

finite god, but a God who has essential attributes including omniscience, perfect goodness, and omnipotence. And these make a big difference.

The Way in Which Scripture is Used by Scripture

A fourth important phenomenon to observe is the way in which Scripture uses other Scripture in argumentation. The instances may be divided into three classes. First, there are those instances where the whole argument rests on a word. In Matthew 22:43-45, the entire argument rests on the single word "Lord." Jesus cites Psalm 110:1 and appeals to the use of "Lord" as support for his claim to deity. In John 10:34, 35, discussed above, Jesus' argument rests on the use of the single word "god" in Psalm 82:6.

Second, there is an instance where the entire argument depends on the tense of a verb. In Matthew 22:32, Jesus appeals to Exodus 3:6 and the present tense of the verb to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection. He says, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

Third, in Galatians 3:16, we have an argument where the point depends on the singular number, seed, as opposed to the plural, seeds. Paul writes: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ." Now, if the text of Scripture is not inerrant, it is difficult to see the point in these arguments. An easy rebuttal would be, "Well, the text may be wrong."

The Biblical Teaching Concerning the Character of God

More than once in Scripture we are told that God cannot lie, Numbers 23:19 and Titus 1:2. Furthermore, Paul in Romans 3:4 admonishes that we should protect the truthfulness of God, even at the cost of making all men liars. Thus, Jesus can say of God's word, "your word is truth," John 17:17. If the Scriptures are from God and his character is behind them, it would seem that they could not be in error.

Having now surveyed the phenomena or data of Scripture which support a doctrine of inerrancy, let us try to formulate just such a definition.

A DEFINITION OF INERRANCY

One of the factors that makes a generalization about the biblical data concerning itself so difficult is the already mentioned fact that Scripture makes no explicit statement on this matter. While this would not settle the matter decisively, as I have already argued above, it would give us a running start. Lacking this, however, we must begin with a search for appropriate terminology. A number have been suggested; the most common are: inspiration, infectibility, infallibility, indeceivability, and without error or inerrant. Let us now turn to an examination of these.

As has already been indicated, for at least a fair number of biblical and theological scholars inspiration and inerrancy were synonymous. To say that the Bible is inspired is to say that it is absolutely accurate. Two examples of men who held such a view were B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge. Today, such identification would be more confusing than helpful. Thus, I think it better to search further for another appropriate term.

A second possibility that has been suggested by Hans Küng is indefectibility.⁴⁶ "Indefectibility" means abiding or remaining in the truth in spite of errors which touch even upon doctrine. One can hardly do better than the judgment of Bloesch on this matter: "This seems to call into question the absolute normativeness of Scripture in the church's understanding of the truth of revelation."⁴⁷ This is clearly at odds with the phenomena presented above. We must try to do better.

Another possibility is infallibility. This is a word with a long history of theological use. Most likely the best place to begin a discussion of the term is with a definition from *Oxford English Dictionary*. "Infallibility" means "the quality or fact of being infallible or exempt from liability to err," or "the quality of being unfailing or not liable to fail; unfailing certainty."⁴⁸ Of the adjective "infallible" when predicated of things the *OED* says, "not liable to fail, unfailing," "not liable to prove false, erroneous, or mistaken; that unfailingly holds good," or "not liable to fail in its action or operation."⁴⁹ From merely the standpoint of definition it would be difficult to maintain a *clear* distinction between this term and "inerrancy," although it would always be possible to stipulate one.

However, when we turn to the question of usage, the picture gets a bit more complex. Within Roman Catholic theology "inerrant" is normally used when discussing the Bible, while "infallible" is the designation given to the authority of the church, particularly with respect to the teaching function of the pope and the magisterium. Because of ecclesiological differences Protestants do not claim infallibility for the church, and more and more "infallibility" has become associated with the Scriptures. More recently, it has been a term championed by those who would support what has been called limited inspiration or what today we might better call limited inerrancy. That is, those who often advance this word to the exclusion of inerrancy would at most defend the inerrancy of the Scriptures in areas that are "revelational," "soteriological," or "matters of faith and doctrine." Because of the differing usages of "infallibility," Stephen T. Davis in his recent book gives a stipulative definition. He says that infallibility means that the Bible is not false or will not mislead us on matters of faith and practice.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 139ff., 181ff.

⁴⁷Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, p. 68.

⁴⁸*Oxford English Dictionary*, p. 1426.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰Davis, *Debate About the Bible*, p. 23.

At any rate, "infallibility" is a term that can and should properly be used of the Bible. Given its lexical meaning, it is not, however, far from "inerrancy."

Another candidate is indeceivability. It is questionable whether the term *per se* has been used to express the biblical attitude about itself. However, there are a long list of theologians, Briggs,⁵¹ Berkouwer,⁵² Rogers,⁵³ Hubbard,⁵⁴ and Bloesch,⁵⁵ who would like to affirm that the Bible is without error, but define error in this way. These latter men are evangelical in their theology, they have a real love and respect for the Scriptures, but think that there are inaccuracies of various kinds in the Bible and thus do not like the word *inerrancy*. They would rather stick with a designation like "without error," and then define "error" in terms of indeceivability.

Let us take a moment to examine their argument, since this position seems to me to be gaining wider adherence within evangelical circles. Usually, the starting place is a displeasure with the word *inerrancy* for various reasons that shall be discussed below. Therefore, they prefer to speak of the Bible's authority or even infallibility. However, some at least can live with a statement on Scripture like that found in the Lausanne Covenant which says that the Bible is "without error in all that it affirms." There is a caveat. "Error" must be defined. Since it is such an important term, it is argued, we must not let just anyone specify its meaning. The place a definition must be sought is in the Scriptures themselves. The advantage, so it is claimed, is that we will not be imposing an alien standard upon the Bible. It is as though the imprecision of early historical writing is preserved in the meaning of the word "error." "Without error" means free from lying and fraud for someone like Berkouwer.⁵⁶ For Rogers "error" means "willful deception," and for Hubbard "that which leads us astray from the will of God or the knowledge of his truth."⁵⁷ Thus, error becomes associated with (1) the intentionality of the writer or text, and (2) the will of God, particularly as it has to do with religious or spiritual truth.⁵⁸

What shall we say about such a proposal? There are at least two commendatory things that can be said about this attempt to reflect the biblical attitude toward itself. First, it does take into account that errorlessness in some sense must be attributed to the Scriptures. Second, it seeks to deal seriously with the biblical data.

⁵¹Briggs, *Bible, Church and Reason*, pp. 91-95.

⁵²G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, trans. and ed. Jack Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

⁵³Jack Rogers, "The Church Doctrine of Authority," in ed. Jack Rogers (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977).

⁵⁴Hubbard, "Current Tensions."

⁵⁵Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, pp. 67-70.

⁵⁶Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 184-194.

⁵⁷Rogers, "Church Doctrine of Authority," p. 46.

⁵⁸Hubbard, "Current Tensions," p. 168.

There are, however, in my judgment three reasons for thinking that this is inadequate in the final analysis. First, there is a methodological reason. As I have already stated, there is no explicit statement in Scripture to the effect that it is without error. If there were, then it would certainly be appropriate to start our definition with a study of the etymology and usage of the Hebrew and Greek term or terms used in this connection. This is not possible in this case. Error or inerrancy are theological concepts.⁵⁹ That is, they are used by the theologian to express what the data demands. This, however, in no way counts *a priori* against *any* concept. For instance, "trinity" is in the same boat, since it is not to be found anywhere in the Bible. Furthermore, as I have argued earlier, even biblical terms when used in doctrinal or theological statements are subject to the same constraints as are any formulations about inerrancy or error.

My second reason is biblical. It may be that there will be those who will not agree with the distinction between biblical and theological usage, so let me move to the level of the biblical. For a moment let it be granted that Berkouwer, Rogers, et al., are methodologically right and I am wrong. I still think that their conclusions are open to serious question. The reason is this. Any definition of error in terms of indeceivability which appeals to the biblical vocabulary is too selective. Or to put it another way, indeceivability fails to reflect the polydimensionality of the biblical words for error. In both Hebrew and Greek the words may be classified into three groups: (1) errors where intentionality cannot possibly be involved; (2) errors where intentionality may or may not be involved; and (3) errors where intentionality must be involved. Let us take a quick look at each of these groups.

Clearly, the Bible teaches that some errors are made without intentionality. In the Hebrew Old Testament words coming from גָּלַץ and חָלַץ are good examples of this. The idea is "to stray," "to err," even "to transgress *inadvertantly*."⁶⁰ In Job 6:24, Job says, "Teach me, and I will be silent; And show me how I have erred." In view of Job's contention that he is innocent he must be maintaining that any error is unintentional since he is unaware of it. Again in Job 19:4 we read, "Even if I have truly erred, My error lodges with me." One cannot maintain that Job's use of error is intentional error without doing violence to the text. Now it might be argued that the Scripture does not allow for inadvertant error, but that it does not hold the individual responsible. But this too is just false. From the roots mentioned above the Old Testament has words for sins of ignorance. Leviticus 5:18 says, "He is to bring to the priest a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned *unintentionally* and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him." The same is true of Greek. The word for this kind of error is

⁵⁹Herman Ridderbos, "An Attempt at the Theological Definition of Inerrancy, Infallibility, and Authority," *International Reformed Bulletin*, 32 and 33, 11th Year (January-April, 1968), pp. 27-41.

⁶⁰Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Edward Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

ἀγνοῖα. It means a shortcoming, *error* or *thing ignored*.⁶¹ In Hebrews 9:7, it is used of sins of ignorance, "But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the *sins* the people had committed in ignorance."

The second class of terms has to do with errors where intentionality may or may not be involved. This seems to be the largest group. In the Hebrew Old Testament a good example of this classification is *ḥṭāʾ*. It means "a fault," "error," and comes from the root *ḥāṭāʾ*, "to deceive" or "to be negligent."⁶² It is used in 2 Samuel 6:7. Here it is difficult to tell if the deception or negligence is intentional or not. In the Greek New Testament *ἀστοχέω* means "to miss the mark."⁶³ Here again, in my judgment it is impossible to determine whether one missed the mark intentionally or unintentionally. The word is used three times in the New Testament (1 Tim. 1:6, 6:21; 2 Tim. 2:18).

Finally, there are a group of words used for error which must include the idea of intentionality. In the Hebrew Old Testament *ḥāṭāʾ* and *ʿayḥāṭāʾ* are used. The first of these terms is used in the *hiphel* and has as one of its meanings "to seduce,"⁶⁴ while the latter means "a fraud."⁶⁵ In the Greek New Testament there are also two words that fall within this class, *ἀποπλᾶγῶ* and *πλᾶνῆ*. The former term can mean "to seduce,"⁶⁶ the latter, "fraudulence."⁶⁷

As should be noted from the discussion, greater emphasis has been placed on the first classification. This was done to show the inadequacy of the proposal before us. Fundamentally, the problem is that it seeks to retain a term, but there is a price to pay. The expense is a decided weakening of meaning. For instance, if we accept Rogers' understanding of error as "willful deception," then almost every book that has ever been written is inerrant.

The third reason that I find this proposal inadequate is motivational. In practice there is the retention of a word that has a long and important history, but it is so diluted that it no longer means the same thing. The motivation is not a more precise definition of "error" or "inerrancy," but ultimately the admission that there are "unimportant" errors of history, science, etc. Thus, one finds it hard to resist the observation that it is an attempt to get the tent flap raised so that the camel can come in.

The final possibility that I have raised is "inerrant" or "without error." "Inerrancy" itself is a relatively young word in the English language. At first it appears as though it might be a transliteration of the Latin word

⁶¹W. R. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (University of Chicago Press; Cambridge at the University Press, 1957), p. 11.

⁶²Brown, et al., *Hebrew and English Lexicon*.

⁶³Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 117.

⁶⁴Brown, et al., *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 1073.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1074.

⁶⁶Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 96.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 671

inerrantia, which would be a participle from the verb *inerro*. However, such is not the case. *Inerrans* is used of fixed stars by Cicero and Lactantius. Boethius, who lived in the latter part of the sixth century and the early part of the seventh, uses the Latin term "inerratum" in the sense of "absence of error."⁶⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that it was not until 1837 that "inerrant" was used in the modern sense of "exempt from error, free from mistake, infallible." Moreover, the noun "inerrancy" is said to have occurred for the first time in the formidable four-volume *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* written by Thomas Hartwell Horne (1780-1862).⁶⁹ In part ii of volume II of the seventh edition (1834) he states, "Absolute inerrancy is impracticable in any printed book."⁷⁰ It is, however, possible that the word appeared as early as the first edition in 1818.

In current usage the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers this definition of "inerrancy." It is "the quality or condition of being inerrant or unerring; freedom from error." For "inerrant," "does not err; free from error; unerring."⁷¹ On the other hand, "errant" is defined as follows: "the action or state of erring;" "the condition of erring in opinion; the holding of mistaken notions or beliefs;" or "something incorrectly done through ignorance or inadvertence; a mistake."⁷² Hence, it is easy to see why some equate "without error" and "inerrant."

In all fairness not all evangelicals like the designation "inerrancy." Why is this so? Obviously, there are many reasons, stated and otherwise.

LaSor says, "Those who defend the 'inerrancy of the Bible' generally mean by that word that the Bible contains no error of any kind, whether religious, historical, geographical, geological, numerical, or of any other category. The term is not proper, for since it negates a negative idea, it does not leave room for a correct opposite."⁷³ "Inerrancy," then, is unacceptable because it is essentially the negation of a negative concept. The consequence, LaSor goes on to say, is that the opposite of "inerrancy" is not "errancy" but the total infallibility of the Bible in matters of faith and practice. LaSor then points out what he thinks are problems, even inconsistencies, although he hesitates to call them outright errors.⁷⁴ One surely may wonder at this use of logic and language. Inconsistencies are errors of the surest kind.

⁶⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, p. 1424.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 892.

⁷³ William Sanford LaSor, "Life Under Tension--Fuller Theological Seminary and 'The Battle for the Bible,'" *Theology, News and Notes*, Special Issue, Fuller Theological Seminary (1976), p. 23.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25.

Ridderbos⁷⁵ and Piepkorn⁷⁶ do not like the word "inerrancy" because it is not a biblical word. Piepkorn states the case clearly: "Lutheran clergymen and professors affirm everything that the Sacred Scriptures say about themselves and everything that the Lutheran symbols say about the Sacred Scriptures. It is significant therefore that the term 'inerrancy' does not correspond to any vocable in the Lutheran symbols."⁷⁷ Ridderbos thinks that it is a theological concept.⁷⁸ On the other hand, Piepkorn classifies it as "an ecclesiastical term subject to definition by use."⁷⁹

By far the most extensive criticism of the term "inerrancy" that I have seen comes from Pinnock. It is only fair to note that he has been in the past one of the most able defenders of an inerrant Bible, and even now continues to claim that it is a good term.⁸⁰ His reasons for suggesting at least a moratorium on the term are as follows. First, he sees the word as needing major qualifications. Such words are a liability and should be avoided where possible. Second, the term does not describe any Bible that we in fact use. It only refers to the original autographs. Third, since its reference is to a non-extant text, it does not assert forcibly the authority of the texts that we do have. Fourth, it misfocuses attention on the small or minor difficulties in the text rather than on the truth which it intends to explain. Finally, "inerrancy" has become a slogan, and as such is a term of "conflict and ill-feeling."⁸¹ Thus, Pinnock can conclude:

It seems to me, in view of the serious disadvantages the term inerrancy presents, that we ought to suspend it from the list of preferred terminology for stating the evangelical doctrine of Scripture, and let it appear only in the midst of the working out of the details. It is

⁷⁵Ridderbos, "Attempt at the Theological Definition."

⁷⁶Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?" *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXVI (1963), pp. 577-593.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 577.

⁷⁸Ridderbos, "Attempt at the Theological Definition," pp. 33ff.

⁷⁹Piepkorn, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?"

⁸⁰Clark Pinnock's *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971) is the able defense of inerrancy to which I refer. In his more recent work, Pinnock has been increasingly critical of the doctrine and its defenders, although he has claimed that he still holds the doctrine. One can trace this change in attitude if not substance in these articles: "Inspiration and Authority: A Truce Proposal," *The Other Side* (May-June, 1976), pp. 61-65. This article was sent to Theological Student Fellowship, and all references are to this latter publication; "The Inerrancy Debate Among the Evangelicals," *Theology, News and Notes*, Special Edition, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1976, pp. 11-13; and "Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology," in *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), pp. 47-73.

⁸¹Pinnock, "Truce Proposal," p. 4.

sufficient for us in our public statements to affirm the divine inspiration and final authority of the Bible.⁸²

One should not merely dismiss Pinnock's concerns without consideration. However, it may be wondered why "inerrancy" does not forcibly enough assert the authority of the Bible. Possibly, there is the need to express the biblical view in more than just *one* term. Nevertheless, this should not count against a word's use if indeed it is appropriate. Or, the fact that it may be a slogan or misdirect the attention of some, may be unfortunate, but if the concept that it seeks to convey is correct, then we must use it or a better term. All of this is just to say that I do not have an inalienable affection for the word "inerrancy." It is the concept of a *wholly* true Bible for which I contend. If some better word be found, then let us use it.

What is needed, I think, is a more clear and precise definition of "inerrancy" rather than a new term. People surely accept and reject the word without agreeing with or even knowing what the other party means by the word.

It seems to me that the key concept both in the Scriptures and in the minds of those who use the term is truthfulness. Inerrancy has to do with *truth*. Hence, I think that the positive side of the negative idea is that if the Bible is *inerrant*, then it is *wholly true*. If this is the case, there are two ways in which this could be preserved. First, we could drop the term *inerrant* from the list of preferred terminology and substitute *all true*. Rather than saying, "I believe the Bible is inerrant," we could say, "I believe the Bible is all or wholly true." Second, continue the use of "inerrant" and clearly specify that it is to be associated with "truth."

Since the latter is more likely given the widespread use of the term, let me propose this definition of inerrancy. *Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that it teaches, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other disciplines of knowledge.*

I would be willing to contend that inerrancy defined in terms of truth is a legitimate way of reflecting the biblical data. In the most extended treatment in the Bible on the Word of God, Psalm 119, three times truth is used as a characterization. "Thy law is truth" (v. 142), "all Thy commandments are truth" (v. 151), and "The sum of Thy word is truth" (v. 160). Proverbs 30:5, 6 say that "every word of God has proven true" (Berkeley version). John 17:17 says, "Thy word is truth." It is this idea that is appropriate to the English word inerrancy. Such a definition has the advantage of defining a negative in terms of a positive concept. Conversely, it will mean that the Bible is never false.

Now, only half the job is done. "Truth" or "true" must be defined. While the Bible points to truth as an essential attribute of God, it does not give us a precise theological definition. We see it in use. However, truth is an abstract and possibly ambiguous term. There is always the danger that

⁸² Ibid.

one will only move the debate from a discussion of "error" to a debate over the meaning of "truth" or "true."

For its pristine simplicity and clarity one can hardly beat the definition of Aristotle. He said, "To say what is, is, and what is not, is not, is true. And to say what is, is not, and what is not, is, is false."⁸³

More recently, the work of a Polish logician named Tarski has proved exceedingly helpful with regard to defining truth.⁸⁴ What Tarski did was to reduce the notion of truth to certain other semantic notions which were clearly, or better, widely acceptable. He defined truth in terms of a schemata for a language: 'Snow is white' if and only if snow is white. The words in single quotes are a linguistic entity, and the analogous words without quotes refer to reality. The characteristics of Tarski's definition are as follows: (1) truth is defined in terms of language; (2) truth is defined in terms of *sentences* (that is, truth is a property of sentences), not individual words; and (3) truth is defined in terms of *correspondence*.

While Tarski's theory of truth has undergone some modification in the years that have passed since its proposal, substantially the same semantic theory of truth is widely held in linguistic and philosophical circles today.⁸⁵

A fair question to ask at this point is, "Why should we import a philosophical notion to explain the Bible?" The answer is threefold. First, there is nothing inherently wrong with philosophical notions. If they adequately fit the data, there should be no hesitancy to apply them. This is particularly true in the area of logic. Second, this is a linguistic or semantic definition of truth. Since the Scriptures are in words or language, such a definition may be of help. Third, the fact that this definition is widely accepted in philosophical and scientific circles adds credibility to it. Hence, if it does not do violence to the scriptural phenomena, its use should be a boon, not a hindrance.

OBSERVATIONS, QUALIFICATIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Having defined the term inerrancy, now let us turn to its elaboration as a doctrine. This elaboration will take the form of some observations, some qualifications, and finally some misunderstandings of the doctrine of inerrancy. The purpose of these considerations is to guide us in the application of the doctrine to the remaining phenomena of Scripture. First, let us make two observations.

⁸³Aristotle.

⁸⁴Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in *Logic, Semantics, and Meta-mathematics* (New York: Oxford, 1956).

⁸⁵Cf. Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," *Synthese*, XVII (September 1967), pp. 304-323, and Hartry Field, "Tarski's Theory of Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXIX (July 13, 1972), pp. 347-375.

1. *No doctrine of inerrancy can determine in advance the solution to individual or specific problem passages.* The doctrine of inerrancy only gives guidelines or parameters for the handling of individual passages. It tells us that there is some sense in which what is taught is true. This does not even guarantee universal agreement as to how a problem passage should be treated, and the difficulty dissolved. Undoubtedly, there will be debate as to which approach is best.

2. *Inerrancy is a doctrine which must be asserted, but which may not be demonstrated with respect to all the phenomena of Scripture.* There is in this definition of inerrancy the explicit recognition of both the fallibility and the finiteness of the present state of human knowledge. There is really only this choice: either the theologian will trust the word of an omnipotent, omniscient God who says that he controlled human agents, making it necessary to admit his fallibility as critic, or in some sense restrict the aforementioned control and affirm at least his own relative and finite omniscience as critic. Since Christ exhibited total trust in the Scriptures, can we do less? All that is claimed is that there will be no final conflict with truth.

There are, I think, just three qualifications that must be made to the doctrine of inerrancy. They are as follows.

1. *Inerrancy applies equally to all parts of the Scripture as originally written (original autographa).* The doctrine of inerrancy applies only to the original autographa, not any existing copy of Scripture. This qualification is often-times objected to on the grounds that it serves as a neat hedge against disproving the doctrine. That is, any time there is a difficulty, one can assign the problem to the copy while claiming it is nonexistent in the original. Indeed, such a qualification can be a hedge, *but it need not be.* The qualification simply grows out of the recognition that *any* text will contain some errors due to transmission.

But it might be argued that if we no longer possess the original autographs, the qualification is meaningless. Such an objection is only justified on one of two grounds, neither of which apply to the Bible. The first ground would be the lack of an adequate discipline of textual criticism. This is not so. The second basis would be a text so corrupt that even the canons of textual criticism could not make it intelligible. Again, such is not the case.

Still one might object that such a qualification is unnecessary since the Spirit of God uses and blesses the existent, errant copies which we possess today. The introduction of original autographs is another example of evangelical overbelief. Again, I think the objection is false. Those who make this objection fail to recognize the difference between an original that is inerrant and which has errors due to transmission and an original that has substantive errors and has been further corrupted in transmission. With respect to the former, an inerrant text can be approached through textual criticism, while in the latter case the text is hopelessly lost in at least some instances.

2. *Inerrancy is intimately tied up with hermeneutics.* Hermeneutics is the science of biblical interpretation. While others will write on this topic, three short comments seem appropriate here. First, the common distinction between the Bible as given and as interpreted must be made here. Though the Scriptures as given are all true, no human interpretation of it is infallible. Second, inerrancy has as a precondition the proper application of hermeneutics. We *must* know what the text *means* before we can know whether what it says is *true*. Third, a key principle in the application of hermeneutics is the analogy of faith as taught by the Reformers. This principle merely says that we attempt to harmonize apparently contradictory statements in the Bible. That is, if there is a way of understanding a passage so that it is in harmony with the rest of Scripture and a way of understanding that conflicts with all or parts of Scripture, the former is the correct interpretation. This often entails the recognition that there is progress in God's revelation, not in the sense that latter revelation shows the earlier false, but rather supplements it. It is only in this way that it can be affirmed that the Bible is true in the whole and in its parts.

3. *Inerrancy is related to Scriptures' intention.* The point that I am trying to make here has two aspects. First, Scripture accurately records many things that are false, e.g., the falsehoods of satan and other human beings. This point is often made in differing ways. Sometimes it is stated in terms of what the Bible *teaches* or *affirms* and what it merely *records*. Another way of putting it is to distinguish between *historical* or *descriptive* authority and *normative* authority.⁸⁶ Historical or descriptive authority applies equally to every word of an inerrant Bible. It merely means that whatever was said or done, was indeed said or done. No judgment is passed as to whether it should or should not have been said or done. Normative authority, on the other hand, not only means that what was said or done was so, but that it should have been said or done.

It should be noted again that there will not be universal agreement always as to whether something falls within historical authority or normative authority. Gerstner makes the point this way:

Suppose they [the biblical writers] did think of a three-storied universe, which was the common opinion in their day, the Bible does not err unless it teaches such as a divine revelation of truth. In fact, by showing that the writers may have personally entertained ideas now antiquated it reveals its own historical authenticity without its normative authenticity suffering.⁸⁷

Some may be a bit surprised at such a solution to the matter above. Hence, Pinnock's word is in order:

The device is certainly a neat one, and gets us around some real difficulties. However, it conceals a hazardous

⁸⁶ John Gerstner, *Biblical Inerrancy Primer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 49.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

principle. In admitting errors into the text itself, even into the body of teaching that text affords, the point is conceded to the critics of the Bible in every age; namely, that the actual teachings of Scripture may, or may *not*, be true.⁸⁸

The point to be made here is that we cannot preclude in advance the possibility that some of the content of the historically or descriptively authentic may contain errors. This does not, however, admit errors into what I have called the teaching of Scripture. At the same time great caution must be used in invoking this solution since it is fraught with hazards.

Second, this intention is found in the *meanings* of the biblical sentences. I have used the term Scripture's rather than author's intention to make it clear that the latter is contained in the former, or to put it another way, the determination of intention is a hermeneutical, not psychological, task.

Finally, I think it is helpful to enumerate and discuss some misunderstandings of the doctrine of inerrancy. For some who criticize inerrancy these would be considered qualifications. Hence, one of the grounds on which they reject the doctrine is that it must be *so* qualified to be maintained that it becomes meaningless. I think this is false, and shall specify why in the discussion of objections below. These misunderstandings of which I speak are as follows.

1. *Inerrancy does not demand strict adherence to the rules of grammar.* One of the advantages of defining inerrancy in terms of truth and truth as a property of sentences, is that the debate over whether a grammatical error is an error is transcended. Now the answer is clearly, no. This is as it should be. The rules of grammar are merely statements of normal usage of the language. Every day skilled writers break them in the service of superior communication. Why should the writers of Scripture be denied this privilege?

2. *Inerrancy does not exclude the use of either figures of speech or literary genre.* It is recognized by all that Scripture employs figures of speech. Some examples are meiosis (Gal. 5:14), hyperbole (Matt. 2:3), synecdoche (Gal. 1:16), personification (Gal. 3:8), and metonymy (Rom. 3:30). Figures of speech are common to ordinary literary form and cannot be considered to be false. While it may not always be easy to determine whether language is figurative or literal, there is nothing inherent in figurative language which prevents it from expressing truth and meaning in its own way.⁸⁹

Moreover, literary genres are employed with the text of Scripture. There is dramatic and apocalyptic literature. There are Psalms that are wisdom and royal in their form. The literary style or form has nothing to do with the *truth* or *falsity* of the content conveyed by that style. Knowledge of the form does, however, help in the interpretation of the passage.

⁸⁸Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, pp. 77-78.

⁸⁹William R. Eichhorst, "The Issue of Biblical Inerrancy in Definition and Defense," *Grace Journal*, p. 8.

3. *Inerrancy does not demand historical or semantic precision.* It is often stated that inerrancy cannot be accepted because the canons of historical and linguistic precision are not those of the modern world. Like so many words used in the debate between inerrantists and errantists, precision is an ambiguous term. To some it has the connotation of error. This surely need not be so. As some of the divines of past ages put it, all that is necessary is that the statements be adequate. I have interpreted this in terms of truth. Almost any historical or linguistic sentence is capable of greater precision. Any historiography, even if one writes a chronicle, is still only an approximation. Let me illustrate what I am getting at. If we record an event as having transpired in 1978, we could always have said it more precisely, in the month of May, May 15th, May 15th at 10 p.m. and so on. The crucial point as I see it for inerrancy is this. Is the sentence as stated *true*? If so, then there is no problem for the doctrine. Why should our criteria for precision be absolutized? Should we not expect Scripture to reflect the standards of its day? Is it not arrogant to think that ours are true and theirs false?

4. *Inerrancy does not demand the technical or observational language of modern science.* One should not expect the writers of Scripture to use the language of modern scientific empiricism. First, it was not their intention to provide a scientific explanation for all things. Second, popular or observational language is used even today by the common man. In it the sun rises and sets. This in no way entails a theory of solar rotation. I am not convinced that this is not the way in which we are to understand the so-called "three-storied" universe. Unless one takes the statements of Scripture in crass geographic terms, I do not see the inappropriateness of such language. I think that much of the concern comes from a presumed similarity to certain contemporary myths. But why should this presumption be made? My contention is that if there is some sense in which the "scientific" language of Scripture is true, then the doctrine of inerrancy is not threatened. Third, it must be noted that there are many philosophers of science who would hold that scientific theories about the nature of reality are not descriptive but solely instrumental or operational.⁹⁰ Thus, to absolutize the present language of science is to find oneself out on a limb with someone sawing away at the branch--even other fellow scientists!

Let me again record here the possibility that certain alleged scientific problems may be accounted for in the distinction between descriptive or historical authority and normative authority.

5. *Inerrancy does not require verbal exactness in the citation of the Old Testament by the New.* In some ways this issue is obscured by discussing it in terms of the Old Testament *quotations* in the New. For this reason I have used what I hope is a more neutral word, "citation." Quotation immediately gives one the picture of our present linguistic conventions of quotation marks, ellipses, brackets, and footnotes. None of this was a part of the Hebrew and Greek of biblical times. When we quote, we quote with verbal exactness, or we note that we have deviated from this through one of the aforementioned conventions. However, we cite things in many ways beside quotation. We use

⁹⁰ Suppe, *Structure of Scientific Theories*.

indirect discourse. We can call on our memory to recall what was said, sometimes only giving the gist or general idea of what was exactly said. All of these are done in the New Testament, and there are no conventions to advise us which method of citation is being employed. Furthermore, citation of any kind in the New Testament involved translation. Since the Old Testament was in Hebrew, it had to be translated into Greek either by the New Testament writer himself or by someone else like a translator of Septuagint.⁹¹

6. *Inerrancy does not demand that the Logia Jesu (the sayings of Jesus) contain the ipsissima verba (the exact words) of Jesus, only the ipsissima vox (the exact voice).* This point is closely akin to the one just made before. When a New Testament writer cites the sayings of Jesus, it need not be the case that Jesus said those exact words. Undoubtedly, the exact words of Jesus are to be found in the New Testament, but they need not be in every instance. For one thing, many of the sayings were spoken by our Lord in Aramaic, and thus had to be translated into Greek. Moreover, as was mentioned above, the writers of the New Testament did not have available to them the linguistic conventions that we do today. Thus, it is impossible for us to know which of the sayings are direct quotes, which are indirect discourse, and which are free renderings.⁹² With regard to the sayings of Jesus, what would count against inerrancy? The words in the sense of *ipsissima vox* were not uttered by Jesus, or the *ipsissima verba* were spoken by our Lord but so used by the writer that the meaning given by the writer is inconsistent with the intended meaning of Jesus.

7. *Inerrancy does not guarantee the exhaustive comprehensiveness of any single account or of combined accounts where those are involved.* This point is somewhat related to the early statement on precision. It must be remembered that from the standpoint of any discipline, even theology, the Scriptures are partial. Often-times this is misunderstood to mean incorrect or false. This is false. The Bible is a complete revelation of all that man needs for faith and practice. What is meant is that there are many things that we might like to know, but which God has not seen fit to record. It is also true that God has not seen fit to record every detail in every account.

I think that this point has implications in another direction, the gospel accounts. The problems in the gospels are well known and cannot possibly be dealt with in the limited space available. However, a giant step forward in the quest to resolve the problems will be taken when one realizes that each evangelist need not give an exhaustive account of any event. He has the right to record the event in light of his purposes in relating it. Moreover, it must be remembered that the accounts of all four gospel writers do not exhaust the details on any event. Hence, there may be some unknown bit of information which would resolve seeming conflicts. All that is required is that the sentences used by the writer be true.

⁹¹Eichhorst, "Issue of Biblical Inerrancy," p. 7. Cf. Roger Nicole, "New Testament Use of the Old Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 144.

⁹²Grant R. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission: A Case Study Toward a Biblical Understanding of Inerrancy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, pp. 83-85.

8. *Inerrancy does not demand the infallibility or inerrancy of the non-inspired sources used by biblical writers.* Form and redaction criticism of the biblical texts raise the question of sources as it has never been raised before. These forms of literary criticism make it necessary to face the possibility that the use of non-inspired sources is much more widespread than was previously thought.⁹³ Thus, two comments are in order. The definition and doctrine of inerrancy advocated does not rule out *a priori* the possibility that sources are cited with historical and descriptive authority, not normative authority. That is, the errors that these non-inspired sources contain are accurately recorded since Scripture's intention is not to assert that those erroneous points are true.

SOME FINAL OBJECTIONS

Throughout the course of this paper I have tried to deal at least with the major objections to the points that I have made. There are three final objections that are of sufficient weight that they require at least some mention and answer. By far the most important is the first.

Has not your definition so qualified the concept of inerrancy that it is no longer meaningful? Pinnock thinks that the need for qualification is a liability and says, "This means that the discussion often has the air of unreality and even dishonesty about it."⁹⁴ Are we just avoiding the obvious fact that inerrancy is false? I do not believe so.

As a matter of fact, I seriously question whether these are qualifications at all. They are, as stated before, misunderstandings by those who reject inerrancy. If they were qualifications and they grew out of an *ad hoc* desire to prevent falsification of one's doctrine, then indeed Pinnock's and others' criticism would be justified. However, since they are not, then the picture is quite different. It must be remembered that words have more than one meaning. Thus, it becomes necessary to specify which meaning is to be applied in the case in point. The more important the statement, the more precisely it needs to be specified. Notice the great care with which legal documents are prepared. What is important is the consistency of one's own treatment of a doctrine, not whether it is consistent given certain views imposed on it by others from the outside. Sure, it is inconsistent to hold certain views and yet to claim that the Bible is inerrant, but that is not the question here. The question here is this. Is this formulation inconsistent? Or more generally, are all formulations inconsistent?

What would really constitute a qualified view of inerrancy? In my judgment it would be a view that retained the word and developed a doctrine, but used it in a sense that was contrary to customary usage. Such an attempt would be a case of special pleading. As I see it, this definition does not do that. It seeks to employ the term "inerrancy" in connection with "truth,"

⁹³Joseph A. Hill, "The Bible and Non-Inspired Sources," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, III (Fall 1960), pp. 78-100.

⁹⁴Pinnock, "Truce Proposal," p. 4.

and a usual use of "truth" at that. Thus I do not think these are qualifications, only attempts to specify language more precisely.

Finally, if these are qualifications, then they are qualifications which apply to all books, particularly those of antiquity.⁹⁵ Thus, a case of special pleading is not being advocated for the Bible. I am only asking that the principle of charity, which should be used in interpreting any text, be applied to the Bible.

Does not the Bible itself distinguish between the authoritative Word of God and the fallible opinions of its human authors? The ground for such an objection is found in 1 Corinthians 7:10 where Paul says, "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord)," and in verse 12 he says, "To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord)." Is this not proof positive in the text of Scripture that the Word of God must be distinguished from the fallible opinions of its human authors? While I might interpret what Paul has to say in this way, it is neither necessary nor best. In verse 10, Paul is pointing out that what he is saying has been said before by our Lord, while in verse 12, Paul is the vehicle of new revelation. That is, what he says has not been said before. Later in Chapter 14:27, he says that what he wrote is the command of the Lord. Thus, the distinction is not between revelation and non-revelation, infallible and fallible, as it is a division within revelation (the infallible) between what is repeated by Paul and what is original with him.

Does not the apostle Paul himself contradict inerrancy in 1 Corinthians 1:16? In this passage Paul says, "beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else." How this bears on errancy or inerrancy is not clear. Inerrancy merely demands that the Bible is all true; inerrancy does not mean total recall. Gerstner puts it well: "If Paul remembered wrongly we would have an uninspired Paul; but a Paul who does not remember is a Paul who is inspired to record that very fact for instruction (presumably, concerning the nature of Inspiration, what it does and does not include, what it does and does not exclude)."⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

The task of this paper has been to specify as clearly and precisely as possible what is meant by the term and doctrine inerrancy. The approach used to achieve this goal was to examine the proper methodology whereby such a doctrine could be reached, then applying that method to the scriptural phenomena or data. After examining a number of possible terms to express the biblical attitude toward itself, it was decided that among the words needed was a word to express the concept of wholly true. It was suggested that this was the heart of the matter whether one used "inerrancy" or not. There was, however, still a need to elaborate the way in which the doctrine functioned in concrete instances. Finally, some previously unanswered objections have been treated.

⁹⁵This can be substantiated by examining principles for the interpretation of literature. All that I am arguing is that the Bible is not a special case, and thus does not involve special pleading.

⁹⁶Gerstner, *Biblical Inerrancy Primer*, p. 44.

The conclusions of this paper concerning the doctrine of inerrancy may be summarized as follows: (1) the term "inerrancy," like other words is subject to misunderstanding and must be clearly defined; (2) "inerrancy" should be defined in terms of truth, making a number of the usual problems mute; (3) while "inerrancy" is not the only word which could express the concept associated with it, it is a good word; and (4) "inerrancy" is not the only quality of the Bible that needs to be affirmed. After a study of the kind undertaken in this paper, one cannot do better than to close with the words of Isaiah:

The grass withers, the flower fades,
When the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
Surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.

Isaiah 40:7, 8

PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF BIBLICAL ERRANCY

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PAPER SUMMARY

The Scriptures warn: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy" (Col. 2:8). Nowhere is this danger of not heeding Paul's exhortation more apparent than in the modern neo-evangelical drift from the historic biblical doctrine of inerrancy. This paper attempts to expose some of the major philosophical presuppositions from the seventeenth century on which have contributed to the current crisis in biblical authority. Beginning with Bacon's inductivism and proceeding through Hobbe's materialism, Spinoza's rationalism, Hume's skeptical empiricism, the authority of Scripture was progressively undermined. With Kant's agnosticism and Kierkegaard's existentialism the major philosophical presuppositions leading to a denial of the inerrancy of Scripture were firmly implanted in western theological thought. Contemporary neo-evangelical denials of inerrancy borrow from one or more of these alien and unjustified philosophical presuppositions.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF BIBLICAL ERRANCY

Norman L. Geisler

Assuming what has been well documented by others, that the teaching of Jesus, the biblical writers, and virtually all of the orthodox church fathers down through the centuries have held the doctrine of the full inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, we proceed in this essay to ask the question: where and how did the modern church get off the track? Ironically enough one of the modern errantists has pinpointed the issue well. Stephen T. Davis writes:

What leads them to liberalism, apart from cultural and personal issues, is their acceptance of certain philosophical or scientific assumptions that are inimical to evangelical theology--e.g., assumptions about what is "believable to modern people," "consistent with modern science," "acceptable by twentieth-century canons of scholarship," and the like.¹

What is especially ironic about Davis' insight is that he falls prey himself to "certain philosophical or scientific assumptions that are inimical to evangelical theology." The reason for this is implied in the warning of the apostle: "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to the traditions of men . . ." (Col. 2:8). Philosophy is an exceedingly subtle discipline. Very often it is that *with* which we think rather than that about which we think. Hence, philosophical presuppositions are often imbibed unconsciously in the study of other disciplines. It has been my experience in evangelical circles that godly scholars, unaware of the nature and implications of their scholarly research, sometimes absorb into their thinking philosophical presuppositions that are antithetical to the historical Christian position on Scripture. The result of accepting these unchristian assumptions shows up only gradually in their own teaching and writing. Often they are discovered first by students and then later by other scholars. Tragically, the person who unwittingly bought into these presuppositions is the last to realize it. When it does come to his awareness there is the perennial temptation, not always resisted, to rewrite evangelical history to fit his new beliefs about Scripture. It would seem far more honest simply to admit, as indeed even some liberal scholars do, that the historic position was the full inerrancy of Scripture and that one has simply come not to believe it. Since not all have seen fit to do this, it is our obligation to expose the false presuppositions which undermine the full authority of Scripture "and to take every thought captive to obey Christ . . ." (2 Cor. 10:5).

¹Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p. 139.

SOME ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

The two dominant philosophies emanating from ancient Greece are platonism and aristotelianism. Both philosophies taught many premises which an evangelical Christian cannot accept. Aristotle taught that matter was eternal, that man was mortal, and that God did not love the world. All are clearly contrary to Scripture. Plato taught the eternality of matter, the preexistence of the soul, and salvation by human intellectual effort. These too are inimical to Christianity.

The Alleged Aristotelian Background of Inerrancy

Jack Rogers claims that the aristotelian exaltation of human reason and logic, adopted by certain post-Reformation theologians like Turretin, have scholasticized orthodox Christianity and led to the doctrine of inerrancy. This, says Rogers, was later canonized by the Old Princetonians, Hodge and Warfield. In Rogers' own words:

The Old Princeton tradition clearly has its roots in the scholasticism of Turretin and Thomas Aquinas. This tradition is a reactionary one developed to refute attacks on the Bible, especially by the science of biblical criticism. The demand for reason prior to faith in the authority of the Bible seems wedded to a prior commitment to aristotelian philosophy.²

Now there are several ways in which Rogers' claim does not square with the facts. First, the "aristotelian" Turretin did not originate the doctrine of inerrancy. The platonic Augustine, who had scarcely an aristotelian bone in his body, clearly held to inerrancy. Augustine wrote to Jerome, "I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error." What did Augustine do with apparent contradictions in the Bible? He replied, "I do not hesitate to suppose that either the ms. is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it."³ Elsewhere Augustine wrote, "It seems to me that the most disastrous consequence must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books." For, he adds, "if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement . . . , there will not be left a single statement of those books which, . . . if appearing to anyone difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away. . . ."⁴

Secondly, Augustine, in whose broad tradition Rogers himself fits, was not the fideist Rogers would make him to be. Rogers objected to Turretin putting "reason before faith." If by this he means that one should not use the law of non-contradiction to test the consistency of an alleged revelation, then Rogers runs contrary to both Augustine and Scripture. Paul warns Timothy

²Jack Rogers, *Biblical Authority* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1977), p. 45.

³Augustine, *Letters*, LXXXII, 3.

⁴Augustine, *Letters*, XXVIII, 3.

to "avoid . . . contradictions" (1 Tim. 6:20), using the strong word ἀντιθέσεις. Indeed, if the law of non-contradiction does not apply to revelation, then how can one fulfill the biblical imperative to "test spirits" in order to find the "spirit of *truth*" as opposed to the "spirit of *error*" (v. 6)? Likewise, it would be impossible to know a false prophet or false messiah from a true one unless the law of non-contradiction holds (cf. Matt. 24:24). For if a statement can be both true and false at the same time in the same sense (which is what the law of non-contradiction forbids) then one cannot distinguish between truth and falsity.

Thirdly, Rogers speaks as if Aristotle invented the law of non-contradiction. At best Aristotle did not *invent* it but was the first in the West to *discover* it and write about it. Ever since there has been a thinking being, the law has been in operation. Indeed, the law of non-contradiction is reflective of the very consistency in the mind of God. And since man is made in God's image, it should not seem strange that it is a basic law of human thinking.

Fourthly, even Rogers and other errantists use the law of non-contradiction as a pillar of their position. The very reason they are errantists is because they believe there are errors or *contradictions* in the Bible. But how could they know there were contradictions without using the law of non-contradiction? In this sense Rogers and the errantists must place "reason prior to faith" themselves. For they do not accept by faith everything affirmed in Scripture. On the contrary, they "reason" (by means of the law of non-contradiction) that two contradictory affirmations cannot both be true and that a statement contrary to fact must be false.

Now it is precisely in this same way that Hodge, Warfield and others used the basic inescapable laws of human logic in deriving the doctrine of inerrancy from Scripture. For the only valid conclusion from two clearly taught truths of Scripture is the doctrine of inerrancy. For the Bible clearly teaches: 1) the Bible is the very utterance of God; 2) whatever God affirms is completely true and without error. Anyone familiar with the basic laws of reasoning can readily see that one and only one conclusion follows from these two biblical premises, namely, 3) whatever the Bible affirms is completely true and without error.

Finally, it was not Aquinas nor Turretin who first applied logic to God's revelation. The biblical writers themselves warned the believers to "avoid . . . contradictions" and anything "contrary" to sound doctrine. Even Tertullian, one of the most fideistically inclined early Fathers, said, "all the properties of God ought to be as rational as they are natural. I require reason in His goodness, because nothing else can be properly accounted good than that which is rationally good; much less can goodness itself be defected in any irrationality."⁵ Even the father of modern existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard himself, affirmed that one should not believe what is absurd or contradictory⁶ and went so far as to say that

⁵Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1, 23.

⁶Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 504.

"the eternal essential truth (i.e., God) is by no means in itself paradoxical."⁷ Now if Rogers wishes to deny that the laws of logic apply to God or of His revelation, it would, incredible as it seems, be going beyond Tertullian and Kierkegaard into irrational fideism.

Platonic Presuppositions

A further irony in Rogers' position is his assumption of the relative harmlessness of platonic presuppositions as they bear on the inerrancy of Scripture.⁸ While Rogers consciously rejects Turretin's "aristotelian rationalism," he unconsciously adopts a kind of platonic "spiritualism." Plato taught that the "real" world is not the world of our senses but the "spiritual" world of forms. Truth, for Plato, is found in this spiritual world. The material world, the space-time world, is at best a "shadow" of the real world for Plato and in certain later gnostic forms of platonism the bodily-material world is essentially evil. Now Rogers is apparently not aware of the fact that this dualistic separation of the material and spiritual worlds is a philosophical presupposition at the root of the errancy position. Why is it that some of those who deny the inerrancy of Scripture speak against a physical resurrection in favor of a spiritual one? We must remember how the Greek philosophers reacted when Paul spoke of the physical resurrection of Christ: they mocked (Acts 17:32). Why? Because according to Plato and other Greek philosophers matter is separate and distinctly inferior to the spiritual. In short, matter doesn't really matter. Or, never mind anything except mind and the spiritual. Could this be why certain of our errancy brothers are so willing to give up some of the affirmations of the Bible about the material world and stress the "spiritual" truths as the important ones to hold as infallible?

Historically, there is little question that platonic philosophy influenced the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture, which obscured and often denied the literal truths of Scripture. This is unmistakably a platonic influence opposed to the position that the affirmations of the Bible should be taken with the literal and historical implications with which they were intended by God and the authors of Scripture. Hence, interestingly enough, the very platonic philosophy that Rogers favors vis-a-vis Aristotle is itself the ancient forerunner of modern denials of inerrancy.

MODERN PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS WHICH UNDERMINE INERRANCY

It would take volumes to document thoroughly the various philosophies which have led to the rejection of inerrancy. Space here will permit recording only some of the more significant ones in the modern world. The seeds of this denial were already present in the late Middle Ages and Reformation period. Roger Bacon's inductivism and William Ockham's skepticism are two cases in point. However, the traditional doctrine of Scripture was not seriously nor officially corrupted by these influences until after the

⁷Ibid., p. 183.

⁸Rogers, *Biblical Authority*, pp. 18-23.

Reformation. The most significant outbreak came in the seventeenth century to which we turn out attention.

Francis Bacon--Inductivism

About a hundred years after the Reformation, Bacon published his famous *Novum Organum* (1620) in which he set the stage for modern biblical criticism and the denial of the full authority and inerrancy of the Bible. Inerrancy is undermined in several ways in this work.

Bacon claimed all truth is discovered inductively. After tearing down the "idols" of the old deductive method of discovering truth, Bacon argued that "the best demonstration is by far experience."⁹ The inductive method, said Bacon, is the true way for the interpretation of nature. One can understand how Bacon could consider his new inductive logic a valid method for scientific enquiry, but Bacon went far beyond reasonable bounds of application of induction when he claimed universal applicability of the inductive method. He wrote:

It may also be asked . . . whether I speak of natural philosophy only, or whether I mean that the other sciences, logic, ethics, and politics, should be arrived on by this method. Now I certainly mean what I have said to be understood of them all; and as the common logic, which governs by the syllogism, extends not only to the natural but to all science, so does mine also, which proceeds by induction, embrace everything.¹⁰

Science is the true model of the world. In view of this exaltation and extension of the inductive method, it is not surprising to hear Bacon say, "I am building in the human understanding a true model of the world, such as it is in fact, not such as a man's own reason would have it to be." This new and true model Bacon dared to claim would discover "the Creator's own stamp upon creation." He even went so far as to identify it with "the ideas of the divine."¹¹

Truth is known pragmatically. Bacon saw clearly that his method implied a pragmatic test for truth, namely, if it works, it is true. "Truth," he wrote, "and utility are here the very same things."¹² For "of all signs there is none more certain or more noble than that taken from fruits. For fruits and works are as it were sponsors and sureties for the truth of philosophies."¹³ In short, all truth is tested by its results. So here we have pragmatism some three centuries before William James or John Dewey.

⁹Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1960), Book one, LXX.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, CXXVII.

¹¹*Ibid.*, CXXIV.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*, LXXIII.

The separation of science and the Bible. Some have mistakenly claimed that Thomas Aquinas is responsible for separating faith and reason. This view is historically unfounded. Aquinas did make a formal *distinction* between the two realms but never an *actual separation*. For Aquinas, human reason at its best was finite, fallible and could never attain the content of the Christian Faith.¹⁴ Reason was only the servant of the theologian, a tool in the discovery and expression of one's faith.¹⁵ But what Aquinas did not do, others like Bacon did: Bacon, e.g., completely separated the realm of reason and science from the realm of faith and religion. Bacon wrote, "It is therefore most wise soberly to render unto faith the things that are faith's" for from the "absurd mixture of matters divine and human" proceed heresies and "fantastical philosophy." It is for this reason that "sacred theology must be drawn from the word and oracles of God, not from the light of nature, or the dictates of reason." Bacon went so far as to say "We are obliged to believe the word of God, though our reason be shocked at it." And therefore, "the more absurd and incredible any divine mystery is, the greater honour we do to God in believing it; and so much the more noble the victory of faith."¹⁶

Science is excluded from Genesis and Job. In view of Bacon's complete separation of faith and science, one is not shocked to hear Bacon debunk taking the biblical affirmations in Genesis and Job as factually true. Bacon said:

Some have endeavored to build a system of natural philosophy on the first chapter of Genesis, the book of Job and other parts of Scripture; seeking thus the dead amongst the living.¹⁷

Now certainly it is one thing to read modern scientific theory into ancient poetry,¹⁸ but it is another to exclude space-time affirmations from the book authored by the Creator of the physical universe. Surely Bacon went too far here.

It is not difficult to see how Bacon set the stage for the view that the Bible is infallible only in "spiritual matters" but does not speak to us inerrantly of historical and scientific matters. If we must render unto science what is science's (namely, *all* truth) then what is left for religion? For Bacon and even more clearly for Hobbes who followed him, the Bible serves a religious and evocative function--it leads us to honor and obey God but does not make cognitive truth claims about God nor affirmations about the physical universe.

¹⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 4, 3-5.

¹⁵Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 2, 10.

¹⁶Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Book I, 45 and Book IX.

¹⁷Ibid., Book I, 65.

¹⁸Harry Rimmer, *The Harmony of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 127.

Thomas Hobbes--Materialism

Hobbes, like Bacon, appears on the surface to be a professing Christian. But in view of the lack of religious toleration in those days (and the natural fear one would have to speak openly against religion) it may be better to understand Hobbes as a tongue-in-cheek atheist. He is generally considered to be the father of modern materialism. There are numerous ways in which Hobbes' views directly and indirectly undermine the traditional doctrine of scriptural authority.

Materialistic sensationalism. Hobbes, the forerunner of Hume's skeptical empiricism, believed that all ideas in one's mind are reducible to sensations.¹⁹ "There is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of Sense. The rest are derived from that original."²⁰ Hobbes' materialism is very explicit. He boldly declared that:

the world (I mean not the earth only . . . , but the *universe*, that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal, that is to say, body; and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of body is likewise body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere.²¹

God-talk is evocative but not descriptive. Hobbes argued that "there is no Idea, or conception of anything we call *Infinite*. . . . And therefore the Name *God* is used, not to make us conceive him . . . but that we may honour him."²² Herein Hobbes is a forerunner of the logical positivists and linguistic analysts who deny the cognitivity of revelational language. As A. J. Ayer later claimed, all God-talk is literally nonsense.²³ Of course if there is no meaningfully descriptive God-talk then none of the propositions in the Bible are really meaningfully descriptive of God. Needless to say, were Hobbes right it would do havoc with any divinely inspired propositional revelation that purports to inform us about God.

Miracles are brought into question. Hobbes discredited the belief in natural religion by claiming it is based on such things as opinions about

¹⁹Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1964), I.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. I.

²¹Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* from *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), Vol. 23.

²²Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Washington Square Press), III, p. 13.

²³See A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., n.d.), Chapter one.

ghosts, ignorance, and fear.²⁴ Supernatural religion, according to Hobbes, is based on miracles. But the credibility of these miracles is seriously weakened he says, by false miracles, contradictions and injustice by the Church that claims them to be true. Furthermore, miracles actually weaken faith because "miracles failing, faith also failed."²⁵ Hobbes appears to undercut the credibility of miracles by placing them in such a poor light and thus opened the door for later deists and naturalists to deny the supernatural altogether. Of course, if Hobbes' implication is right and miracles do not occur, then obviously the Bible cannot be a supernatural revelation from God.

The Bible has absurdities we must accept by blind faith. Some have mistakenly held that Kierkegaard taught that we must make a blind leap of faith into the realm of the rationally absurd. But what Kierkegaard did not teach, Hobbes did. Claiming that our "natural reason" is the "undoubted word of God" which are "not to be folded up in the Napkin of an Implicit Faith." Hobbes claims there are "many things in God's Word above Reason; that is to say, which cannot by natural reason be either demonstrated, or confuted. . . ." These are "not comprehensible" and we must live by the "Will of obedience" to "forbear contradictions; when we so speak, as (by lawful authority) we are commanded . . . and Faith reposed in him that speaketh, though the mind be incapable of any Notion at all from the words spoken."²⁶ Elsewhere Hobbes speaks of the deity of Christ and the Trinity as untranslatable "absurdities."²⁷ If these words are taken seriously, it is one of the most blatant forms of blind fideism ever proposed. What is of significance to our study is the radical separation of faith and reason and the apparent relegation of matters of faith to the unverifiable and paradoxical realm of the absurd and contradictory.

Higher criticism of the Bible. Hobbes is one of the first modern writers to engage in explicit higher criticism of the Scriptures. In one passage he boldly suggests that "the Scriptures by the Spirit of God in man, mean a man's spirit, inclined to Godliness."²⁸ After claiming that the story of Jesus healing the demon-possessed man was simply a "parable," Hobbes announces "I see nothing at all in the Scripture, that requireth a belief, that Demoniacs were any other thing but Mad-men."²⁹ In brief, the miracles of the Gospels must be understood as spiritual or parabolical, but not historical.

Complete separation of religion and science. In view of this kind of hermeneutical de-supernaturalization of Scripture, it is little wonder that Hobbes can claim that "the Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdom

²⁴Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Washington Square Press), XII, pp. 73, 74.

²⁵Hobbes, *Great Books*, Chapter 12, p. 83.

²⁶Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Washington Square Press), pp. 267, 268.

²⁷Ibid., p. 52.

²⁸Ibid., p. 50.

²⁹Ibid., p. 51.

of God, and to prepare their minds to become his obedient subjects; leaving the world, and the Philosophy thereof, to the disputations of men, for the exercising of their natural reason."³⁰ In short, he proposed a complete separation of divine revelation and human reason in which the latter has a monopoly of all cognitive truth and the former demands only blind obedience to its "spiritual" truths. In this respect Hobbes is not only ahead of, but goes beyond both Kierkegaard and Barth!

Spinoza's Rationalism

Higher criticism of the Bible blossoms forth in the Jewish pantheist, Spinoza. Using a strict deductive rationalism, Spinoza constructed a system of higher criticism.

All truth is mathematically knowable. Spinoza limited truth to what is self-evident or what is reducible to it.³¹ He claims that all truth--even religious truth--is mathematically knowable.³² Anything not subject to his deductive geometric reason was rejected.

The Bible contains contradictions. It is not surprising that Spinoza concluded there are contradictions in the Bible. Samuel denies that God ever repents (I Sam. 15:29) and Jeremiah declares that God does repent (Jer. 18:8-10). "Are not these two texts directly contradictory?" asked Spinoza. "Both statements are general, and each is the opposite of the other--what one flatly affirms, the other flatly denies."³³

The Bible merely contains the Word of God. Spinoza affirmed the classic liberal formula of Scripture--the Bible *contains* the Word of God--centuries before it became the byword of modernism. Speaking of the "Scripture" he wrote, "insofar as it contains the word of God, it has come down to us uncorrupted." And not unlike the later liberal Christians, Spinoza claimed that one "will find nothing in what I have written repugnant either to the Word of God or to true religion and faith . . . : contrariwise, they will see that I have strengthened religion . . ."³⁴ Surely with "defenders" like that Christians need no enemies!

The Bible is not a propositional revelation. Centuries before Emil Brunner was ever born, Spinoza denied propositional revelation and was

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Benedict De Spinoza, *The Rationalists*, hereafter referred to as *The Ethics* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), p. 247. Benedict De Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict De Spinoza*, Translated from the Latin, with an introduction by R. H. M. Elwes, Vol. I, Introduction, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, *Tractatus Politicus*; hereafter referred to as *Tractatus* (London: George Bell and Sons, York Street, 1883), p. 81.

³² Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 210.

³³ Spinoza, *Tractatus*, p. 194.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 165.

attacking the straw-man "paper-pope" theory. "I will show," Spinoza boldly claimed, "wherein the law of God consists, and how it cannot be contained in a certain number of books." If anyone should object that "though the law of God is written in the heart, the Bible is nonetheless the Word of God," Spinoza replied: "I fear that such objectors are too anxious to be pious, and that they are in danger of turning religion into superstition, and worshipping paper and ink in place of God's Word."³⁵

The Bible is authoritative only in religious matters. Like Bacon and Hobbes before him, Spinoza relegated the authority of the Bible to purely religious matters. He claimed: "I have neither said anything against the Word of God nor given any foothold to impiety." Why? Because, he continued, "a thing is called sacred and Divine when it is designated for promoting piety, and continues sacred so long as it is religiously used; if the users cease to be pious, the thing ceases to be sacred."³⁶ So as long as the Bible is used for religious purposes, it is a sacred book. Of course, a religious purpose is the only purpose of Scripture for Spinoza, for faith and reason are entirely separate domains. As to the question of "whether the meaning of Scripture should be made to agree with reason; or whether reason should be made to agree with Scripture," Spinoza replied: "both parties are, as I have shown, utterly in the wrong, for either doctrine would require us to tamper with reason or with Scripture." The conclusion is clear: "Scripture does not teach philosophy, but merely obedience, and that all it contains has been adapted to the understanding and established opinions of the multitude."³⁷ In other words, the Bible has nothing to say to reason. It is an accommodation to the false opinions of men who use their senses rather than their minds with which to think. Philosophy, on the contrary, is for those who think rationally (i.e., geometrically and pantheistically). True science is the domain of the intellect; religion is for the obedient will.

Moral criteria used to determine truth of the Bible. Commenting on the authenticity of the great love command in Matthew 22, Spinoza confidently concluded:

This cannot be a spurious passage, nor due to a hasty and mistaken scribe, for if the Bible had ever put forth a different doctrine it would have to change the whole of its teaching, for this is the cornerstone of religion, without which the whole fabric would fall headlong to the ground.³⁸

Spinoza applied the same moral criteria for determining the authenticity of Scripture as a whole. "The only reason," he argued, "which we have for belief in Scripture or the writings of the prophets, is the doctrine we find therein and the signs by which it is confirmed." For "as we see the prophets

³⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 190.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

extol charity and justice above all things, and have no other object . . ."³⁹ In short, if the passage teaches love and justice, it is authentic; if not then it is not. The circularity of this procedure did not seem to occur to Spinoza's a priori mind. How do we know the biblical teachings of love and justice to begin with, unless they are derived from authenticated Scripture?

Categorical denial of the miraculous. Spinoza is one of the most strongly anti-supernatural writers in the history of philosophy. The major premise of his pantheistic philosophy is that God and Nature are identical.⁴⁰ The belief in miracles is based on ignorance and is used by religious authorities to preserve faith. Spinoza reserved severe words for those who thus believed in the miraculous.

Anyone who seeks for the true causes of miracles and strives to understand natural phenomena as an intelligent being, and not gaze upon them like a fool, is set down and denounced as an impious heretic by those, whom the masses adore as the interpreters of nature and the gods. Such a person knows that, with the removal of ignorance, the wonder which forms their only available means for proving and preserving their authority would vanish also.⁴¹

So dogmatic was Spinoza in his naturalism that he proudly proclaimed: "We may, then, be absolutely certain that every event which is truly described in Scripture necessarily happened, like everything else, according to natural laws."⁴² Why can one make such an absolute assertion? Because, answered Spinoza, "nothing comes to pass in contravention to her [Nature's] universal laws, nay, nothing does not agree with them and follow them, for . . . she keeps a fixed and immutable order."⁴³ Spinoza even appealed to the Bible for proof of his incurable naturalistic presupposition. "Scripture," he declared, "makes the general assertion in several passages that nature's course is fixed and unchangeable."⁴⁴ Spinoza did not mince his words when it came to miracles. He flatly declared: "a miracle, whether a contravention to, or beyond nature, is a mere absurdity."⁴⁵

Systematic higher criticism of the Bible. With such a radical anti-supernatural bias one is not surprised that Spinoza is the father of much of modern biblical criticism. In fact, Spinoza's *Tractatus* was one of the

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 196, 197.

⁴⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, pp. 322, 327.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 212.

⁴² Spinoza, *Tractatus*, p. 92.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

hottest books in Europe in the late seventeenth century, going through numerous pseudonymous editions.⁴⁶

Spinoza began his higher criticism with the Pentateuch. Because of certain names, geographic locations, and third-person references to Moses, he concluded that someone after Moses' time must have been the author. Hence, "as there are many passages in the Pentateuch which Moses could not have written, it follows that the belief that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch is ungrounded and irrational."⁴⁷ Who wrote it? The same person who wrote the rest of the Old Testament, namely, Ezra.⁴⁸

Higher criticism was not reserved for the books of Moses alone. "I pass on, then, to the prophetic books," wrote Spinoza. "An examination of these assures me that the prophecies therein contained have been compiled from other books . . . but are only such as were collected here and there, so that they are fragmentary."⁴⁹ Daniel did not write the whole book of Daniel but only chapter eight to the end.⁵⁰ The Old Testament canon was determined by the Pharisees.⁵¹ The prophets did not in general speak "from revelation" and "the modes of expression and discourse adopted by the Apostles in the Epistles, show very clearly that the latter are not written by revelation and Divine command, but merely by the natural powers and judgment of the authors."⁵²

As to the Gospels, "it is scarcely credible that God can have designated to narrate the life of Christ four times over, and to communicate it thus to mankind."⁵³ As to the crucial doctrine of the resurrection, Spinoza omitted it from the apostles' preaching, saying "the Apostles who came after Christ, preached it to all men as the universal religion solely in virtue of Christ's passion."⁵⁴

It is clear from this that over a century before Johann Semler,⁵⁵ and two centuries before Julius Wellhausen,⁵⁶ Spinoza⁵⁷ engaged in systematic

⁴⁶For the documentation of this point which is a correction of the mistaken statement in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Spinoza," Vol. 7, p. 531, that it "was not discovered for publication until the late eighteenth century," I am indebted to my colleague, Dr. John Woodbridge.

⁴⁷Spinoza, *Tractatus*, p. 126.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 128.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 147.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 150.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 155.

⁵²Ibid., p. 159.

⁵³Ibid., p. 171.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 170.

⁵⁵d. 1791.

⁵⁶d. 1918.

⁵⁷d. 1677.

anti-supernatural criticism of the Bible. Indeed virtually all of the central emphases in modern liberalism from "the Bible contains the Word of God," to the accommodation theory, rationalism, naturalism, the religious-only view, the moral criterion for canonicity and even the allegorical interpretation of Scripture,⁵⁸ are found in Spinoza.

David Hume--Empirical Skepticism

Probably the most significant philosophical figure between Spinoza and Kant with long-range and adverse affects on biblical authority was the Scottish skeptic, David Hume.⁵⁹ There are two major philosophical presuppositions emanating from Hume that undermined the doctrine of biblical inspiration and inerrancy: anti-supernaturalism and radical empiricism.

Hume's empirical atomism. Like Hobbes, Hume believed that all ideas in the mind are traceable to one or more sensations derived from the five senses. There is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses. The result of this was very clear to Hume, that there were only two meaningful kinds of statements: 1) definitional ones, and 2) factual ones. In the now-famous last lines of his *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume wrote:

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hands any volume--of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance--let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.

The implications of Hume's position were captured well by A. J. Ayer in his *Language, Truth and Logic*, where he wrote of "the elimination of Metaphysics" (the title of his first chapter). On the basis of Hume's two kinds of premises, which Ayer called analytic and synthetic respectively, he developed his principle of "empirical verifiability." According to this principle a statement to be meaningful must either be true by definition (such as "all triangles have three sides") or else it must be verifiable by one or more of the five senses. The principle, of course, proved to be too narrow (since it eliminated itself) and had to be revised. But the conclusion reached by Ayer and other semantical atheists after him⁶⁰ is still with us. Ayer concluded that all God-talk is meaningless. Statements like "God loves the world" or even "God exists" are not purely definition for the believer nor can they be empirically verified. But if the statements cannot be verified by the senses then they are literally non-sensical.

⁵⁸Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 24; *Tractatus*, p. 93.

⁵⁹d. 1776.

⁶⁰Such as Paul van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963).

Hence, "to say that 'God exists' is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false."⁶¹ Metaphysical and theological statements can be neither true nor false because they are not even meaningful. They are not really statements about reality at all but expressions of the feeling of the affirmer. As such "moral or religious 'truths' are merely providing material for the psycho-analyst."⁶² Such is the fate of biblical revelation at the hands of a logical positivism springing from the empiricism of Hume.

Building on Hume's radical empiricism Paul van Buren concluded:

The empiricist in us finds the heart of the difficulty not in what is said about God, but in the very talking about God at all. We do not know "what" God is, and we cannot understand how the word "God" is being used.⁶³

Van Buren added, "Today, we cannot even understand the Nietzschean cry that 'God is dead!' for if it were so, how could we know? No, the problem now is that the *word* 'God' is dead."⁶⁴ In short, the result of Hume's empiricism is semantical atheism. The implications of this for propositional revelation are severe. First, no proposition in the Bible can be cognitively true. No biblical declaration is really informative about God. At best religious language is evocative of a religious commitment and at worst it is purely emotive expressing of the religious feelings of the biblical writers.

Hume's anti-supernaturalism. On the surface at least Hume's arguments against miracles are not directed at their possibility (as Spinoza's was) but at their *credibility*. The argument may be summarized thus:

1. A law of nature is based on the highest degree of probability (because it is regular).
2. A miracle is based on the lowest degree of probability (because it is rare).
3. But a wise man always bases his belief on the highest degree of probability.
4. Therefore, the wise man should never believe a miracle has occurred.⁶⁵

Despite the obvious criticism that wise men ought not ignore, the evidence for a *particular* event, say, the resurrection of Christ, in favor of the

⁶¹Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 115.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁶³van Buren, *The Secular Meaning*, p. 84.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶⁵David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1955), Sect. X, p. 117 f.

evidence in *general* that all other men still remain in the grave--Hume at times went well beyond his own empirical basis in experience in arguing against miracles. Only a few pages after the above citation Hume wrote:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and *unalterable experience* has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.⁶⁶

To this Hume added but a few lines later, "*nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happens* in the common course of nature." It is no miracle, said Hume, that a man in good health should suddenly die. "But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life, because that has never been observed in any age or country. There *must, therefore, be a uniform experience* against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit the appellation."⁶⁷ The underlined phases show how a priori and presuppositional Hume's argument really is. He begs the question in favor of anti-supernaturalism by assuming from the beginning that whatever happens in the world will ipso facto be a naturally caused event. Needless to say, if Hume is granted his anti-supernatural presupposition then the Bible cannot be a supernatural revelation of God nor can any event be a miracle, including the resurrection of Christ. In short, grant Hume's empirical atomism and naturalism and one must reject God's supernatural Word.

Kant's Agnosticism

Immanuel Kant has been considered by many to be the cross-road thinker of modern philosophy. Before Kant the main European streams of philosophy were rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz) and empiricism (Locke, Berkeley and Hume). The rationalists stressed the *mind* and the *a priori* element of knowledge; the empiricists stressed the *senses* and the *a posteriori*. Kant began as a rationalist but was "awakened from his dogmatic slumbers" by reading David Hume. Subsequently, Kant wrote his famous *Critique of Pure Reason* in which he synthesized rationalism and empiricism and arrived at agnosticism. Kant argued that the empiricists are right in affirming that the *content* of all knowledge comes from the senses but the rationalists are right in declaring that it is finally *formed* by the *a priori* categories of the mind. That is, the basic "stuff" comes via sensation but the *structure* is by intellection. The result is that knowledge is not constitutive of reality but is literally *constructed* by the *a priori* categories of the mind.

Agnosticism about knowing God by pure reason. The result of Kant's creative synthesis was agnosticism about reality. The mind knows only *after* the construction but not before. Hence, I can know the "thing-to-me" but not the "thing-in-itself." One can know what *appears* to him but not what really is. The former Kant called *phenomena* and the latter, *noumena*. Between the phenomenal and noumenal realms there is an insurpassable gulf fixed by the very nature of the knowing process.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 122 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 122, 123 (emphasis mine).

There is another reason, according to Kant, that we must remain forever ignorant of reality-in-itself. It is simply this: whenever one attempts to apply the categories of his mind (such as unity or causality) to the noumenal real he ends in hopeless contradictions and antinomies. For example, the principle of causality when so applied ends in this antithesis. 1) Thesis: everything must have a cause, hence, there must be a *first* cause to initiate the causality. 2) Antithesis: but if everything must have a cause then so must the first cause and so on into infinity, in which case there is *no first cause* but an infinite regress of causes. Therefore, by applying the principle of causality to the noumenal realm of reality, we end in contradiction and antithesis--a proof that one ought not attempt to apply pure reason to reality.⁶⁸

The fact/value dichotomy. One of the consequences of Kant is the fact/value dichotomy. The "objective" world of fact is the phenomenal world of our experience. This can be known by our minds. The "subjective" world of will cannot be known by "pure reason" but only by what Kant called "practical reason" and by which he meant that which is morally postulated by an act of the will. In his second Critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argued that in order to make sense of our moral duty--the categorical imperative--we must postulate both God and immortality. The argument can be summarized like this:

1. Felicity (happiness) is what all men want.
2. Morality (duty) is what all men ought to do.
3. Unity of these two, the summum bonum (greatest good), ought to be sought.
4. Now unity of these is not possible by finite man in this life.
5. But moral necessity (obligation) of doing something implies the possibility of doing it (ought implies can).
6. Therefore, it is morally necessary for one to postulate:
 - a) Deity to make this unity possible (the power), and
 - b) Immortality to make this unity achievable (time and place).

"Thus God and a future life are two postulates which . . . are inseparable from the obligation which that same reason imposes upon us."⁶⁹

Kant was very careful to point out that this is not a theoretical argument for God's existence but merely a practical postulate. Even though it is not

⁶⁸ Kant confused here the principle of sufficient reason, which holds that *everything* has a reason or cause, which springs from Leibniz and the principle of causality (from Aquinas) which holds that only finite changing things need a cause. The former leads to contradictions; the latter does not.

⁶⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 639.

possible to *think* (i.e., reason for it) God exists yet one must *live* as if God exists. Kant himself clearly believed that God does exist but he was sure there were no rational proofs of God, only a moral postulate of Him. In this move by Kant one can see the big shift in modern thought from the rational to the moral.

Since Kant, Western thinkers have largely given up the quest for rational proofs of reality and have been content with something like moral presuppositions. The shift has been from the realm of mind to that of will, from the objective to the subjective, from fact to value. Kant himself said, "this moral necessity is subjective, that is, it is a want, and not *objective*, that is itself a duty, for there cannot be a duty to suppose the existence of anything."⁷⁰ Technically, then, one must not say "*It is* morally necessary . . ." but "*I am* morally certain . . ." The tragedy is, however, that the two domains are totally disjointed. The mind cannot *know* the realm of value; it can only *will* it. Since God is in the noumenal realm of value, it follows that reason cannot find Him but the will must choose Him. (The way is already prepared for Kierkegaard!) *This fact/value dichotomy is one of the root problems behind the denial of the full inerrancy.* For many who claim the Bible is infallible only in religious or redemptive matters but not necessarily in factual areas are implying this same kind of Kantian disjunction. The assumption is that inspiration and inerrancy cover only the areas of religious "value" but not those areas of Scripture that may relate to tangential and non-essential "fact."

Morality is the essence of true religion. In one sense Kant's work, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, is a Deistic classic. In it Kant used "moral reason" as the grounds for determining what is essential to true religion, a foreshadowing of Schleiermacher to come. Practical reason demanded a moral interpretation of the Bible. "Frequently," wrote Kant, "this interpretation may, in the light of the text (of the revelation), appear forced--it may often really be forced; and yet if the text can possibly support it, it must be preferred to a literal interpretation . . ."⁷¹ Speaking of an ecclesiastical and biblical faith Kant said, "we ought even now to labor industriously, by way of continuously setting free the pure religion from its present shell, which as yet cannot be spared."⁷² In point of fact, it is morality which determines the Bible to be the Word of God. For the Bible's morality "cannot but convince him of its divine nature . . . and hence deserves to be regarded as a divine command."⁷³ Thus the essence of "this [true] religion is 'the Spirit of God, who guides into all truth' . . . which alone constitutes the element of genuine religion in each ecclesiastical faith."⁷⁴ With this inner subjective witness of the spirit alone did Kant

⁷⁰ Immanuel Kant, *The Existence of God*, edited by John Hick (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 139.

⁷¹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), pp. 101, 102.

⁷² *Ibid.*, note on p. 126.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

rest the case for determining both what is true in any religion and even what is to be accepted within the Bible itself.

Morality eliminates the need for the miraculous. Using his moral yardstick to measure religious truth, Kant concluded that miracles are an appropriate introduction to but not "strictly necessary" for a moral religion such as Christianity.⁷⁵ Indeed such a religion must "in the end render superfluous the belief in miracles in general."⁷⁶ The belief that miracles can somehow aid morality Kant designates as "senseless conceit."⁷⁷ Kant did admit that the life of Christ may "all be nothing but miracles" but warns that "in the use of these historical accounts, we do not make it a tenet of religion that the knowing, believing, and professing of them are themselves means whereby we can render ourselves well-pleasing to God."⁷⁸

As to the nature of a miracle, "we cannot know anything at all about supernatural aid . . ."⁷⁹ One thing we can know; if an alleged miracle "flatly contradicts morality, it cannot, despite all appearances, be of God (for example, were a father ordered to kill his son who is, as far as he knows, perfectly innocent)."⁸⁰ It would seem that Kant has thereby morally decided that we must reject the story of Abraham and Isaac! This is higher criticism by personal moral criteria not unlike modern deniers of inerrancy who reject God's command to Israel to kill the Canaanites because "I frankly find it difficult to believe that it was God's will . . ."⁸¹ Further, argued Kant, "to venture beyond these limits [of natural effects] is rashness and immodesty, although those who support miracles frequently pretend to exhibit a humble and self-renouncing way of thought."⁸² Indeed, the bottom line of Kant's subtle attack on miracles is that practical reason demands that we adopt the conclusion that miracles never happen. In a revealing passage Kant argued:

Here we can determine nothing on the basis of knowledge of the object (which, by our own admission, transcends our understanding) but only on the basis of the maxims which are necessary to the use of our reason. Thus, miracles must be admitted as [occurring] *daily* (though indeed hidden under the guise of natural events) or else *never*, and in the latter case they underlie neither our explanations by reason nor the guiding rules of our conduct; and since the former alternative [that they

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 79.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 79, 80.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 179.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 81, 82.

⁸¹ Davis, *Debate About Bible*, p. 97.

⁸² Kant, *Religion Within Limits*, p. 84.

occur daily] is not at all compatible with reason, nothing remains but to adopt the latter maxim--for this principle remains ever a mere maxim for making judgments, not a theoretical assertion.⁸³

In view of Kant's subtle but definitive naturalism we are not surprised to see him use this to reject the resurrection account at the end of the Gospels. Kant wrote:

The death of Christ with which the public record of his life ends (a record which, as public, might serve universally as an example for imitation). The more secret records, added as a sequel, of his *resurrection* and *ascension*, which took place before the eyes only of his intimates, cannot be used in the interest of religion within the limits of reason alone without doing violence to their historical valuation. . . . This is so not merely because this added sequel is an historical narrative (for the story which precedes it is that also) but because, taken literally, it involves a concept, i.e., of the materiality of all worldly beings, which is, indeed, very well suited to man's mode of sensuous representation but which is most burdensome to reason in its faith regarding the future.⁸⁴

Soren Kierkegaard's Existentialism

The existentialism of Kierkegaard, which gave rise to neo-orthodoxy and much of neo-evangelicalism, grew out of the soil of Kantian agnosticism. Kant had declared the noumenal unknowable by reason; Kierkegaard declared God to be "wholly other" and "paradoxical" to human reason (though not paradoxical in Himself). Kant made his way toward moral reality by a subjective act of the will. Kierkegaard called his similar move a "leap of faith." Kant bifurcated the realm of fact and value, and Kierkegaard, too, argued that the factual and historical has no religious significance as such.

Truth is subjectivity. Kierkegaard did not teach that truth is subjective nor that there is no objective truth. Neither did he claim that one should believe what is irrational or contradictory.⁸⁵ He did dismiss, however, objectivity as a way of knowing ultimate or religious truth because "the way of objective reflection leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of different kinds; and always it leads from the subject . . . [and] becomes infinitely indifferent."⁸⁶ Kierkegaard did, nonetheless, say that "truth is subjectivity, an objective uncertainty held

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., footnote on p. 119.

⁸⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 504.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 173.

fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness."⁸⁷ This is why truth is "paradoxical," viz. "the paradoxical character of the truth is its objective uncertainty; this uncertainty is an expression for the passionate inwardness, and this passion is precisely the truth."⁸⁸ But when Kierkegaard said religious truth is "paradoxical" he did not mean it was paradoxical in itself but only to finite man. He wrote, "the eternal essential truth is by no means in itself a paradox; but it becomes paradoxical by virtue of its relationship to an existing individual."⁸⁹ Truth, then, is a subjective encounter with God for which one has no good reason but which one must appropriate by a passionate "leap" of faith.⁹⁰

Objective truth not essential to Christianity. Kierkegaard himself never denied either objective or historical truth of Christianity. He wrote, "when one raises the historical question of the truth of Christianity or what is and is not Christian truth, the Scriptures at once present themselves as documents of decisive significance."⁹¹ He personally believed in the historicity of the Bible, of Christ, and even of the resurrection. In his *Journal*⁹² he even went so far as to say, "The historicity of the redemption must be certain in the same sense as any other historical thing, but not more so, for otherwise the different spheres are confused" However, despite this admission Kierkegaard did not believe that the historicity of the Gospel accounts was essential to Christianity. He wrote:

If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: 'We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died,' it would be more than enough.⁹³

All that is really historically essential is that there was a first century figure who died and in whom his contemporaries *believed* they found God. It is noteworthy that Kierkegaard does not even include the *belief*, to say nothing of the *fact*, of the resurrection in his skeleton historical commitment. Is it accidental that precisely what Kierkegaard, the father of existentialism, believed was the minimal historical necessity of Christianity is precisely what Rudolf Bultmann concluded as a result of his demythological method of interpretation?

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 182.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 183.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), p. 53.

⁹¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 25.

⁹² Quoted in *A Kierkegaardian Critique*, ed. Howard Johnson (Harper & Bros., 1962), p. 213.

⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 130.

Higher criticism does not affect Christianity. So far as I can see, Kierkegaard himself never engaged in higher criticism of the biblical text. He did believe, however, that even the most destructive forms of higher criticism would not be harmful to true Christianity. In a very illuminating passage he declared:

I assume now the opposite, that the opponents have succeeded in proving what they desire about Scripture, with a certainty transcending the most ardent wish of the most passionate hostility--what then? Have the opponents thereby abolished Christianity? By no means. Has the believer been harmed? By no means, not in the least. . . . Because the books are not written by these authors, are not authentic, are not in an integral condition, are not inspired (though this cannot be disproved, since it is an object of faith), it does not follow that these authors have not existed; and above all, it does not follow that Christ has not existed.⁹⁴

Neither Christianity nor Christian belief is harmed by disproving the genuineness and authenticity of Scripture. Herein, Kierkegaard left a gaping hole in the wall of the historic Christian Church through which modern higher criticism has made its destructive march.

Inspiration of Scripture is a subjective matter of faith. Again, so far as I can see, Kierkegaard did not personally deny the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Kierkegaard even attacked a man's claim to have received a private revelation directly from Christ, he wrote, "It is true that Christianity is built upon a revelation, but also it is limited by the definitive revelation it has received. It must not be built upon the revelations which John Doe and James Roe may get."⁹⁵ In another place he added:

Is it not self-contradictory to accept a part of the Bible as God's Word, accept Christianity as Divine teaching--and then, when confronted with something you cannot bring into accord with your intelligence or your emotions to say God is contradicting Himself, whereas actually, it is you who are contradicting yourself, for either you must reject this Divine teaching entirely or put up with it just as it is.⁹⁶

So it seems that Kierkegaard personally accepted the Bible as the Word of God and said, "if it is a revelation we must stand by it, *argue from it*, act in accord with it, transform our whole existence in relation to it."⁹⁷

⁹⁴Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 31.

⁹⁵Soren Kierkegaard, *On Revelation and Authority*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 92.

⁹⁶G. M. Andersen, ed. and trans., *The Diary of S. Kierkegaard* (Peter Owen Limited, 1960), p. 166.

⁹⁷Kierkegaard, *On Revelation and Authority*, pp. 100, 101.

However, his personal beliefs about the inspiration and authority of the Bible notwithstanding, Kierkegaard nonetheless denied that the belief in the inspiration of the Bible had any objective basis. The basis for believing inspiration is purely a subjective matter of faith. "In this connection," wrote Kierkegaard, "a number of topics come up for consideration: the canonicity of the individual books, their authenticity, their integrity, the trustworthiness of their authors." How do we establish all these? "A dogmatic guaranty is posited: Inspiration."⁹⁸ So much is this doctrine sheerly a matter of faith that Kierkegaard deprecates scholarly efforts to defend the inspiration and authenticity of Scripture, saying:

How much time, what great industry, what splendid talents, what distinguished scholarship have been requisitioned from generation to generation in order to bring this miracle [v12, "to make sure of the Scriptures historically and critically"] come to pass. And yet a little dialectical/doubt touching the presuppositions may suddenly arise, sufficient for a long time to unsettle the whole, closing the subterranean way to Christianity which one has attempted to construct objectively and scientifically, *instead of letting the problem remain subjecture, as it is.* [emphasis mine]

It seems clear from the foregoing discussion that for Kierkegaard the doctrine of inspiration is unfalsifiable; it is purely and simply a matter of faith. No factual finds can either confirm it or deny it. Higher criticism cannot disprove it because it is in the realm of the subjective and not the area of the objective. In fact, what we are witnessing here in Kierkegaard is the continuation of the Kantian fact/value dichotomy. No fact can ever disconfirm the realm of religious value which is forever reserved for faith alone.

Propositional is subordinate to the personal. In accord with the fact/value dichotomy Kierkegaard makes another disjunction--that between the propositional and the personal. Although he never denied the Bible is in some sense a propositional revelation, he admitted that there is an objective dimension to truth. Indeed, he believed in the basic Christian doctrines. However, Kierkegaard emphatically adds, "if it is really God's view that Christianity is *only* doctrine [implying that it is *at least* doctrine], a collection of doctrinal propositions, then the New Testament is a ridiculous book."⁹⁹ What Kierkegaard was interested in, as indeed we as evangelicals are deeply concerned about, is that we have more than a dead orthodox acceptance of credal statements about Christ. What is needed is a whole-hearted commitment to the person of Christ known through the propositions of Scripture.

⁹⁸Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 26.

⁹⁹R. G. Smith, ed. and trans., *The Last Years: Journals of S. Kierkegaard 1853-55* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 275. (Hereafter referred to as *Journals*.)

However, Kierkegaard went far beyond the bounds of orthodoxy in the way in which he exalted the personal over the propositional. The Abraham-Isaac story in *Fear and Trembling* is a case in point.¹⁰⁰ The propositional revelation of God says "thou shall not kill." But the personal God reveals Himself to Abraham and commands "sacrifice your son Isaac." According to Kierkegaard, Abraham must leave the realm of rationally understood propositions about God and by an act of non-rational faith accept the Personal over the propositional. That is, when confronted with a conflict between the Law and the Law-Giver one must take the Person of God over propositions about God. Kierkegaard is apparently unable to see that he has made a false disjunction of the personal and propositional in the same manner as he does between fact and value. He does not see that propositional revelation is personal. It is a personal love-letter from the Personal God to persons He loves. We are not confronted in Scripture with the choice between God's revelation and the God of that revelation. All we know about God comes through His revelation. There are indeed times when one revelational command of God conflicts with another (as obeying God over Parents [Matt. 10:37]), but there is never a time when we are asked to go beyond propositional revelation. There is no way to *know* that it is God giving the command unless we have some revelational *knowledge* about who it is that is commanding us.

God is "Wholly Other." For Kierkegaard God is not irrational but he is supra-rational to us. Human reason can neither prove Him nor know Him. God is beyond the reach of reason altogether. Of theistic proofs he wrote, "for whose sake is it that the proof is sought? Faith does not need it; aye, it must even regard proof as an enemy. . . ." It is only "when faith thus begins to lose its passion, when faith begins to cease to be faith, then a proof becomes necessary so as to command respect from the side of unbelief."¹⁰¹ God is the "unknown something with which the Reason collides when inspired by its paradoxical passion, with the result of unsettling even man's knowledge of himself."¹⁰² What is this "Unknown" we call God? Kierkegaard answers, "it is nothing more than a name we assign to it."¹⁰³ The very idea of proving this God exists is ridiculous. For "if the God does not exist it would of course be impossible to prove it; and if he does exist it would be folly to attempt it."¹⁰⁴

So opposed was Kierkegaard to man knowing God by human reason that even in His revelation God is "wholly other." The words of the Bible are not cognitively descriptive of God. They are merely signs or pointers.¹⁰⁵ They are like arrows shot in the direction of God but which fall far short of their target.

¹⁰⁰Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954).

¹⁰¹Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 32.

¹⁰²Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 49.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵Kierkegaard, *Journals*, p. 208.

To treat Scripture as cognitively descriptive of God would be in effect to set it up as a paper pope. "In the main," wrote Kierkegaard, "a reformation which sets the Bible aside would have as much validity now as Luther's breaking with the pope." In this regard, he continued, "the Bible societies have done irreparable damage. Christianity has long needed a religious hero who in fear and trembling had the courage to forbid people to read the Bible."¹⁰⁶

AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE

It is not our purpose here to *refute* presuppositions behind the denial of the full inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture but simply to *expose* them, as we have done above. There are, however, several important conclusions we do wish to draw from this study.

The Claim to be Defenders of True Christianity

Almost to a man, even the most radical critics of the historic position on the authority of Scripture claimed to be the true defenders of the Word of God and essential Christianity. Bacon spoke of the Bible as "the Word of God" which is "the surest medicine against superstition and the most approved nourishment for faith . . . [which] displays the will of God . . ." He added, "For he did not err who said, 'ye err in that ye know not the Scriptures and the power of God.'"¹⁰⁷ Hobbes paradoxically seemed to argue even for the errorlessness of the Bible saying, "for though there be many things in God's Word above Reason; . . . yet there is nothing contrary to it; but when it seemeth so, the fault is either in our unskillful interpretation, or erroneous Ratio-cination."¹⁰⁸ Despite the fact that Spinoza argued that miracles were impossible and engaged in extensive higher criticism of the Bible, he claimed emphatically: "I have said nothing unworthy of Scripture or God's Word . . ."¹⁰⁹ Even though Spinoza believed there were many falsehoods and contradictions in the Bible he doggedly denied undermining confidence in Scripture:

Perhaps I shall be told that I am overthrowing the authority of Scripture . . . , on the contrary, I have shown that my object has been to prevent the clear and uncorrupted passages being accommodated to and corrupted by the faulty ones; neither does the fact that some passages are corrupt warrant us in suspecting all. No Book ever was completely free from faults . . ."¹¹⁰

These passages have a familiar ring. One of the modern defenders of an infallible Bible over against an inerrant one recently argued that unless we admitted minor errors in the Bible "we could never again use the canons of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

¹⁰⁷ Bacon, *The New Organon*, Book one, LXXXIX.

¹⁰⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Washington Square Press), pp. 267, 268.

¹⁰⁹ Spinoza, *Tractatus*, p. 166.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

criticism to support any test against the conjectural reading of liberal critics . . . and all of us agreed that the Bible is, nonetheless, totally reliable and infallible in its teachings."¹¹¹ Even a recent "defender" of inerrancy sounds strangely reminiscent of Spinoza when he wrote: "God uses fallible spokesmen all the time to deliver his word, and it does not follow that the Bible *must* be otherwise."¹¹² The lesson is this: some of the men whose thinking was most destructive to inerrancy thought themselves to be doing a service to "true" Christianity: Beware of their modern counterparts who think they are gaining a major triumph for Christianity by giving up "minor" truths of Scripture!

Presuppositions Are Not Proven Facts

The history of the philosophical influences leading to the denial of the full authority of Scripture show unmistakably that essentially it is not new facts but old philosophies that are leading evangelicals astray. They are--often unwittingly--buying into philosophical presuppositions that are inimical to the historic evangelical view of Scripture. New discoveries in science or archaeology have not prompted these departures from the orthodox view of Scripture. Indeed, the factual evidence is probably more supportive of the inerrancy of Scripture than ever before. The real problem is not factual but philosophical. It is the acceptance, often uncritically, of philosophical premises, such as inductivism, naturalism, rationalism or existentialism, that are basically unreconcilable with the doctrine of the full inspiration of Scripture.

What is more, there is no compelling reason that an evangelical should accept these philosophies. Their philosophies are not proven positions. Often other non-Christian philosophers have offered more than sufficient critiques of each of them. At least no one philosophical position has proven itself to the satisfaction of its non-Christian opponents. And if non-Christians have not been compelled by the arguments for any one of these views, there is no reason why a Christian ought to be. Especially is this so in view of the fact that these positions are antithetical to the orthodox view of Scripture which is at the foundation of our faith. "Beware of philosophy."

Furthermore, often the philosophical presuppositions that undermine the Christian belief in Scripture are circular or self-defeating. The anti-supernaturalists, for example, presuppose the truth of naturalism in order to argue against miracles, saying in effect "whatever happens in the world is, ipso facto, a natural event." The semantical atheists engage in self-defeating claims such as, "no language about God can be cognitively meaningful," which, if effective, is offered as a cognitively meaningful statement about God! In view of this it is not so much our job as Christian philosophers to destroy anti-Christian arguments but to show how they are self-destructive.

¹¹¹William LaSor, *Theological News and Notes* (Fuller Seminary, 1976), p. 7.

¹¹²Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1977), p. 64.

A Philosophy Consistent with the Biblical Revelation

Evangelicals do not all take the same philosophical approach nor do we all come to the same philosophical conclusions. This is not all bad. What we must be careful to do, however, is to be sure that our philosophical approach is not inconsistent with the biblical revelation or what is presupposed by it. The Bible does, for example, teach or presuppose theism and supernaturalism. It seems to me, also, that it presupposes some kind of metaphysical realism and is opposed to complete epistemological agnosticism. Somewhere within these perimeters we may carry on our intramural dialogue, but beyond this we venture only at the risk of engaging in a philosophically self-destructive and a theologically erosive endeavor. What is certain is that there is no biblically or even philosophically justifiable reason why we must adopt into presuppositions that are irreconcilable with the doctrine of Scripture held by the orthodox church down through the centuries.

THE INTERNAL TESTIMONY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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PAPER SUMMARY

The Holy Spirit is related to Scripture in many ways. Some of the most significant are inspiration, illumination, application, conviction, and the *testimonium*. What we are primarily concerned with in this paper is the *testimonium*. The Spirit in the *testimonium*, internal testimony, works to confirm the reliability of Scripture giving us certainty that the Bible is the word of God. The distinctive word here is certainty. This is clearly Augustine's, Calvin's, Luther's, and Warfield's view. It is a view at variance with the Existential, Neo-orthodox concept and men, such as Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Kahler, Emil Brunner, and Thomas Torrance. Here the truth is not the truth until or unless the personal dimension is added. Thus in classical Christian thought, the believing individual makes a subjective response to the objective word through the impetus of the Spirit. For the Existentialist, the subjective response determines the Nature of the word through the kinetic network of the Spirit.

THE INTERNAL TESTIMONY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Testimonium spiritus sancti internum: This Reformation slogan indicating the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, has become increasingly important as the Church wrestles with the question of the integrity of Holy Writ. As we face a crisis of confidence in the authority and reliability of the Apostolic deposit of faith we are drawn repeatedly into deep consideration of the relationship of Word and Spirit. The *testimonium* represents but one facet, albeit a vital facet of this complex relationship of Word and Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is related to Scripture in many ways. Some of the more significant dimensions of the Spirit's work vis-a-vis Scripture include inspiration, illumination, application (conviction), and the *testimonium*.

Inspiration concerns the role of the Spirit on initiating and superintending Word revelation. The *theopneust* of II Timothy 3:16 points to the divine *origin* of Holy Scripture as God "breathes out"¹ his Word. *Illumination* concerns the Spirit's work in assisting the reader to achieve clarity in understanding the content of the Word. It is the Spirit who "searches" the deep things of God and works to assist our naturally carnal minds to understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:10, 14). *Application* refers to the work of the Spirit in applying the content of the Scripture to the life of the believer. A special type of application is conviction, which refers to the Spirit's work in bringing an awareness of sin to the conscience of the individual and a subsequent spirit of penitence to the heart of the convicted.

In all of these activities the Spirit is linked to the Word. The Spirit is not divorced from the Word in such a way as to reduce revelation to an exercise in subjectivism. The Spirit works *with* the Word (*cum verbo*) and *through* the Word (*per verbum*), not *without* or *apart* from the Word (*sine verbo*).²

How does the *testimonium* differ from the other facets of the Word and Spirit mentioned above? The uniqueness of the *testimonium* is found in its focus on the question of *certainty*. The Spirit in the Internal Testimony works to confirm the reliability of Scripture, giving us certainty that the Bible is the Word of God. Thus it has been in the arena of apologetics that the *testimonium* has received much attention.

¹B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), p. 133.

²G. C. Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift*, 2 Vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1966) I, p. 74.

THE *TESTIMONIUM* IN CALVIN

John Calvin is usually credited with developing and giving the clearest expression to the Reformation principle of the *testimonium*. He treats this question in the early parts of the *Institutes* and in his *Letter to Sadolet*. Controversy over interpreting Calvin's view of the *testimonium* has engendered some debate, particularly with respect to issues involving apologetics and most particularly with respect to methodological questions regarding the defense of biblical infallibility.³

In Chapter VII of the *Institutes* Calvin sets forth his doctrine of the *testimonium*. He divides his treatment into five sections.

Section 1

In the first section Calvin deals with the foundation of certainty, whether it be from men or from God. In full view here is the issue of whether or not the authority of Scripture rests on the prior authority of the Church. He writes:

A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed-- viz. that Scripture is of importance only insofar as conceded to it by the suffrage of the Church; as if that eternal and inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men. With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God; who can guarantee that they have come down safe and unimpaired to our times; who can persuade us that this book is to be received with reverence, and that one expunged from the list; did not the Church regulate all these things with certainty? On the determination of the Church, therefore, it is said, depend both the reverence which is due to Scripture and the books which are to be admitted into the canon.⁴

Here Calvin obviously had Rome in view, as he wrestled with the question of the ultimate basis for *reverence* for Scripture and with the issue of Canon. Rome consistently appealed to the Church's role in the formation of the Canon as a basis for establishing the priority of church authority, the *testimonium ecclesiae*.

Section 2

In section 2 Calvin responds to the Roman concept of *testimonium ecclesiae* with arguments drawn from the New Testament and from history.

³For a survey of modern theological controversy surrounding the *testimonium* see Barnard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

⁴John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 68-69.

These ravings are admirably refuted by a single expression of an apostle. Paul testifies that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 11:20). If the doctrine of the apostles and prophets is the foundation of the Church, the former must have had its certainty before the latter began to exist . . . For if the Christian Church was founded at first on the writings of the prophets, and the preaching of the apostles, that doctrine, wheresoever it may be found, was certainly ascertained and sanctioned antecedently to the Church, since, but for this, the Church herself never could have existed.⁵

Thus, for Calvin the internal testimony of the Spirit is vital not only to theology in general but to ecclesiology in particular. The Church is subordinate to Scripture, not the Scripture subordinate to the Church.

The relationship of church to canon is critical to the conclusion of section 2. Here Calvin sets forth the classic Reformation view of church and canon:

Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the fiction, that the power of judging Scripture is in the Church, and that on her nod its certainty depends. When the Church receives it, and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful or controverted, but acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bound, shows her reverence by an unhesitating assent.⁶

Here Calvin does not vitiate church authority but places it in its proper subordinate perspective. The Church is indeed active in the historical process of canon formation. But the crucial point is that the Church neither *creates nor validates* the canon. The canon has prior authority and validity. What the Church does in the historical process of canon development is to receive it, acknowledge it to be the truth of God, show reverence to it, and give *unhesitating assent* to it. Note again the action of the Church according to Calvin:

1) *receive*, 2) *acknowledge*, 3) *revere*, 4) *assent*. These terms indicate that the Church does not create the authority of Scripture but recognizes and assents to an authority which is already there. Characteristically Calvin chooses his words carefully, perhaps with a view to the terminology of the Muratorian Canon which was *recipere*.⁷

⁵Ibid., p. 69.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift*, p. 89.

The role of the Church in "receiving" and "acknowledging" the Scripture is echoed in the Reformed Confessions which follow Calvin at this point.⁸

Section 3

In section 3 Calvin responds to the Roman appeal to Augustine's famous statement in which he says that he would not believe the gospel, were he not moved by the authority of the Church. First Calvin locates the context of Augustine's remarks, on the Manichaeian controversy, and goes on to say:

Augustine, therefore, does not here say that the faith of the godly is founded on the authority of the Church; nor does he mean that the certainty of the gospel depends upon it; he merely says that the unbelievers would have no certainty of the gospel, so as thereby to win Christ, were they not influenced by the consent of the Church. And he clearly shows this to be his meaning, by thus expressing himself a little before: "When I have praised my own creed, and ridiculed yours, who do you suppose is to judge between us; or what more is to be done than to quit those who, inviting us to certainty, afterward command us to believe uncertainty, and follow those who invite us, in the first instance, to believe what we are not yet able to comprehend, that waxing stronger through faith itself, we may become able to understand what we believe--no longer men, but God Himself internally strengthening and illuminating our minds."⁹

This last citation from Augustine captures the essence of Calvin's understanding of Augustine. From that quotation we see an incipient expression of Augustine's own doctrine of the *testimonium*. Calvin concludes that the obvious inference to be drawn from Augustine is:

that this holy man had no intention to suspend our faith in Scripture on the nod of decision of the Church, but only to intimate (what we too admit to be true) that those who are not yet enlightened by the Spirit of God, become teachable by reverence for the Church, and thus submit to learn the faith of Christ from the gospel . . . But he nowhere insinuates that the authority which we give to the Scriptures depends on the definitions or devices of men. He only brings forward the universal judgment of the Church, as a point most pertinent to the cause, and one, moreover, in which he had the advantage of his opponents.¹⁰

⁸See II Helvetic Confession, Chapter I; Belgic Confession, Article V; and Westminster Confession, I: 4, 5.

⁹Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 70

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 70-71.

Section 4

In section 4 Calvin presents his view of the relationship between the *testimonium* and other evidence for the authority of Scripture. Calvin begins by asserting the superiority of the "secret testimony of the Spirit" to human conjecture. He says:

Hence, the biggest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character whose word it is . . . our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments, or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit.¹¹

Here Calvin makes it clear that the *testimonium* serves as the ultimate and highest ground of certainty for the believer. The *testimonium* is not placed over against reason as a form of mysticism of subjectivism. Rather it goes beyond and transcends reason. Calvin says:

But I answer, that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit on the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.¹²

Calvin's statement that "the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason" may lead some to conclude that the reformer indulges in a flight into irrationality as a final defense for the authority of Scripture. D. F. Strausz, for example, in the nineteenth century, called this article the "Achilles Heel of Protestantism," because it moved authority out of the objectivity of revelation into the subjectivity of a secret experience which is confined to the hidden chambers of the human heart.¹³

From what follows (namely an entire chapter devoted to objective evidence for biblical authority) it is clear that Calvin is not guilty of such subjectivistic fancy. For Calvin the *testimonium* is not irrational but transrational. That is, the testimony of the Spirit does not move against reason but beyond it. If this is in any way ambiguous in section 4, it becomes manifestly clear in section 5.

Section 5

The clearest statement of the relationship of the *testimonium* to objective evidence we can find in the *Institutes* introduces this section. Calvin writes:

Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift*, p. 42.

its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit.¹⁴

The crucial phrases in this summary statement are (1) "*acquiesce implicitly in Scripture*", (2) "Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it." These two phrases highlight the balance of subjectivity and objectivity in Calvin's *testimonium*. The effect of the internal testimony is that the believer *acquiesces* to Scripture. The internal testimony offers no new argument or content to the evidence found in Scripture objectively but so works in our hearts that we are willing to submit to what is already there.

The concept of *acquiescence* is critical to our understanding of Calvin and thus worthy of further consideration. Calvin here uses the Latin verb, *acquiesce*, to which corresponds the English meaning:

1. to rest satisfied, or apparently satisfied, or to rest without opposition and discontent: usually implying previous opposition, uneasiness of dislike, but ultimate compliance or submission; as to *acquiesce* in the dispensations of Providence.
- Syn. - acede, agree, consent, submit, yield, comply, concur, conform.¹⁵

The implicit connotation of this *acquiescence* is agreement "without reservation or doubt."¹⁶ We see it earlier in Augustine's development of the concept of the *fides implicitum*.¹⁷

Thus Calvin describes the effect of the *testimonium* in terms of the believers unqualified assent to or yielding to the Scripture. Where the believer formerly was "tossed to and fro in a sea of doubts," he now rests peaceably in the assurance that the Bible is indeed the Word of God.

The second phrase, "that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit . . ." calls attention to the fact that for Calvin, the *testimonium* does not function in a vacuum. There is an inseparable relationship between *testimonium* and objective evidence. The *testimonium* does not function either against the evidence or apart from the evidence, but produces *acquiescence* to the evidence. The Scripture objectively evidences that it is the Word of God. The Spirit does not prove true what evidences to be false but rather gives us the quiet assurance that the

¹⁴Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 72.

¹⁵Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary (unabridged) General Editor, Jim L. McKechnie (New York: The World Publishing Co.).

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷See Harnack's treatment of the development of the *fides implicitum* in Roman Catholic thought in his *History of Dogma*, Vols. IV and V.

evidence is certain. The Spirit causes us to submit to or yield to the evidence. Our yielding is a subjective act to an objective basis of evidence.

If the relationship between *testimonium* and evidence is in any way vague in Chapter VII, it becomes clear in Chapter VIII. In Chapter VIII, Calvin enumerates the *indicia* or evidence the Scriptures have for their divine origin and authority. He speaks of the dignity of the matter, the heavenliness of its doctrine, the consent of its parts, the majesty of its style, the antiquity of its teaching, the sincerity of its narrative, its miracles, predictive prophecies fulfilled, its use through the ages and its witness by the blood of the martyrs. He sees this evidence not as being weak and tentative but objectively strong and compelling. He says of the Scriptures' own evidence:

True, were I called to contend with the craftiest despisers of God, I trust, though I am not possessed of the highest ability or eloquence, I should not find it difficult to stop their obstreperous mouths; I could, without much ado, put down the boastings which they mutter in corners, were anything to be gained by refuting their cavils (VII/4).¹⁸

Again Calvin writes:

There are other reasons, neither few nor teeble, by which the dignity and majesty of the Scriptures may be not only proved to the pious, but also completely vindicated against the cavils of slanderers (VIII/13).¹⁹

The *indicia* provide objective evidence which Calvin calls "proof." To refuse to submit to this evidence is regarded as caviling and a form of slander. Those who contend against Scripture are called obstreperous. However, in spite of the number and the power of the *indicia* they remain incapable, in themselves, to produce a "firm faith" in Scripture unless they are accompanied by the *testimonium*. Calvin says:

These, however, cannot of themselves produce a firm faith in Scripture until our heavenly Father manifest his presence in it, and thereby secure implicit reverence for it . . . Still the human testimonies which go to confirm it will not be without effect, if they are used in subordination to that chief and highest proof as secondary helps to our weakness. But it is foolish to attempt to prove to infidels that the Scripture is the Word of God. This cannot be known to be, except by faith (VIII/13).²⁰

¹⁸Calvin, *Institutes*, pp. 71-72.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 83.

The question Calvin leaves for us is, "Why, if the *indicia* are so strong objectively, do they fail to yield certainty? Why is the *testimonium* necessary?"

To answer this question we must look to Calvin's view of the depravity of man and consequently to the noetic effects of sin. We must say that man's problem with certainty here is not so much an intellectual problem but a moral one. To be sure the moral problem touches heavily upon the intellect, as the prejudice of the heart against God clouds the mind and makes it "dark."

THE PROBLEM OF CERTAINTY

Since the *testimonium* is related to our certainty concerning the authority of Scripture, it is important for us to have before us a clear understanding of what we mean by "certainty." The word provokes much discussion and not a little confusion, inasmuch as it is capable of different technical and common usages. Let us enumerate three distinct ways in which the word "certainty" may be used.

1. Philosophical or Formal Certainty

Philosophical certainty has to do with formal arguments that are so logically tight and compelling that to deny the conclusion would be to yield to manifest irrationality or absurdity. This kind of certainty can only be found within the framework of the formal relationship of propositions. The components of a syllogism serve to illustrate this. Let us examine the classical model syllogism to illustrate formal certainty:

Premise A: All men are mortal
 Premise B: *Socrates is a man*
 Conclusion: Socrates is a mortal

In this syllogism the canons of logic dictate that *if* premise A is true *and* premise B is true, then the conclusion is necessarily, by resistless logic, true. Note, however, that the truth of the conclusion, though it flows irresistibly from the premises, is still ultimately dependent upon the truth of the premises. Unless we can demonstrate the truth of the premises we cannot claim absolute certainty for the conclusion. Thus the certainty of the conclusion is conditioned by and dependent upon the certainty of the premises. Though the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises, it could be conceivably false if one or both of the premises is false. To state it another way, the conclusion could be formally valid but still not materially true.

With the syllogism in view do we know with absolute certainty that Socrates was in fact mortal? Since the conclusion rests on its premises, let us examine the certainty quotient of the premises.

Do we know with certainty that all men are mortal? If so, how do we know it? By reason? By sense perception? Could we possibly prove this statement to be true? To prove it absolutely we would have to examine every human being

who has ever lived and is now alive to prove our claim. Here we run head-on into the limits of induction. To know inductively that all men are mortal we would have to observe the death of all men, including ourselves! The only way we could have absolute certainty that all men are mortal would be posthumously! It may seem ridiculous to say we do not know all men are mortal in light of the overwhelming evidence to the fact that human beings die. Millions of mortal humans have come and gone and precious few have escaped death. Even Christ died. (The notable exceptions include Enoch and Elijah. Even these two, though spared death, were never said to be *incapable* of death.) But we are speaking here of strict, absolute certainty. Until all the data is in we cannot make absolute universal assertions on the basis of induction. Thus an element of uncertainty, however miniscule, attends the assertion of Premise A.

What about Premise B? How do we know that Socrates was a man? Maybe he was an angel in disguise. Perhaps he was bionic or a figment of the creative imagination of Plato. We trust the reports of fallible men of antiquity for our information about Socrates. We have a high degree of probability that there really was a Socrates but we lack absolute certainty.

Absolute philosophical certainty is limited to relative and conditional formal relationships of propositions. We can never achieve such certainty about the real world as long as we are dependent in any way upon induction. This should not lead us to undue skepticism about the possibility of knowledge but simply to a healthy awareness of the limits of our faculties of knowledge. These limits are a part of our creatureliness. As long as our capacity for knowledge is the slightest bit less than omniscient, then the problem of philosophical certainty will remain. Only a being who is omniscient can transcend the problem. In other words, only God can have philosophical certainty. Since we are not and cannot be gods, we are left with philosophical uncertainty.

2. Confidence as Certainty

In spite of the above consideration we still answer certain questions in our lives routinely by using the word, "certainty." We make assertions to which some respond, "Are you sure?" We reply, "Yes." How can we be "sure" about anything if absolute certainty is beyond the scope of our ability?

Obviously when we speak of being "sure" of things or say "certainty" we are speaking about a kind of certainty which is not the same as a technical philosophical certainty. Here we are using the word "certain" in a way that describes a particular feeling state which attends a given idea or assertion. Here the word "certain" describes a sense of confidence or assurance. Such a certainty can manifest relative degrees of intensity as it is more or less subjected to a mixture of doubt.

3. Moral Certainty

The third variety of certainty may be termed *moral certainty* or *juridical certainty*. This is the certainty of the law courts which speaks of "reasonable doubt." Suppose we have a case of a person committing cold-blooded murder, in

the presence of five hundred witnesses, whose ruthless act is captured by a broadcast television camera. To compound the evidence the culprit is arrested while holding a smoking gun, which fired the fatal bullet and which bears a clear image of his fingerprints. The cumulative weight of this evidence is presented by the prosecution at the trial of the accused.

Suppose now that the defense attorney for the accused seeks exoneration on the basis of an appeal to the lack of absolute certainty concerning the guilt of his client. He argues that (1) the five hundred witnesses suffered a mass hallucination; (2) the television account was a carefully contrived electronic charade; (3) the ballistics report matching the fatal bullet with the firearm found in the hands of his client suffers the lack of certainty found in all inductive studies involving empirical evidence; (4) the fact that his client's fingerprints match the prints taken from the gun is admitted by the lawyer but he argues that this represents the first occasion in history where two different people are found to have identical sets of fingerprints. Thus the defense rests its case on a philosophical appeal to the theoretical possibility that his client is a victim of strange and extraordinary circumstances. The circumstantial evidence amassed by the prosecution is presented as being less than absolutely certain so the defense asks for acquittal on the basis of "reasonable doubt."

How do we respond to such a bizarre scenario? The doubt raised by the defense may indeed be *rational*, but is it *reasonable*? The courts recognize the difference. Without a distinction between formal certainty and moral certainty it would be impossible to convict anyone of a crime unless God Himself were both prosecutor and judge.

Thus moral certainty refers to certainty acquired from the weight of evidence which, though lacking in philosophical certainty, is weighty enough to impose moral culpability. It is precisely this kind of certainty which the *indicia* of Scripture yield.

Though Calvin does not articulate the kind of distinction outlined above, it is spelled out by his disciples. Warfield, for example, cites Quenstedt on this point:

The exact relations of the "proofs" to the divinity of Scripture, which Calvin teaches, was sufficiently clear to be caught by his successors. It is admirably stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith. And we may add that the same conception is stated also very precisely by Quenstedt: "These motives, as well internal as external, by which we are led to the knowledge of the authority of Scripture, make the theopneusty of Sacred Scripture *probable*, and produce a *certitude which is not merely conjectural but moral* . . . they do not make the divinity of Scripture infallible and altogether indubitable . . . That is to say, they are not of the nature of *demonstration*, but nevertheless give *moral certitude* . . ."²¹

²¹B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1956), p. 74.

The bridge from moral certitude to full assurance is constructed uniquely by the *testimonium*. The testimony of the Spirit puts the heart at rest and at peace covering the authority of Scripture.

HEART OR HEAD AS THE OBJECT OF THE *TESTIMONIUM*?

Is the *testimonium* a cognitive act of the Spirit, involving primarily an intellectual thrust, or is the primacy of the Spirit's activity located in the heart or the will? If we examine the *Institutes* we see that in sections four and five of chapter seven Calvin alternates between mind and heart. He refers to the heart four times and the mind three times. This makes for some difficulty in locating the primacy of Calvin's thrust.

Perhaps the solution to this difficulty may be found in Calvin's qualifications of the kind of faith which is affected by the *testimonium*. Calvin speaks of "full faith" (7/4), "full credit in the hearts of men" (7/4), "full conviction" (7/5), "feel perfectly assured" (7/5), "true faith" (7/5), "full conviction" (8/1), and "firm faith" (8/13).

Only the Spirit can produce the fullness of faith and conviction Calvin speaks of. The *indicia* alone do not have the power to produce that kind of faith. Warfield says of this dimension:

This prevalent misapprehension of Calvin's meaning is due to neglect to observe the precise thing for which he affirms the *indicia* to be ineffective and the precise reason he assigns for this ineffectiveness. There is only one thing which he says they cannot do: that is to produce "sound faith" . . . And their failure to produce "sound faith" is due solely to the *subjective condition* of man, which is such that a creative operation of the Holy Spirit in the soul is requisite before he can exercise "sound faith."²²

It is thus the sinful condition of fallen man which makes the *testimonium* necessary. Inasmuch as the Heart is indisposed toward God outside of grace, the mind refuses to embrace the Scripture. Here we see a parallel with the Reformation tripartite notion of faith as being composed of *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. The *indicia* is sufficient to produce *assensus* but not *fiducia*. Herein we may discern what Calvin means by *full* faith. It is a faith which goes beyond mere intellectual assent to an acquiescence of the heart and will to the Word of God.

Again Warfield notes: "The testimony of the Spirit is the subjective preparation of the heart to receive the objective evidence in a sympathetic embrace."²³ Again quoting Beza, Warfield writes:

²²Ibid., p. 87.

²³Ibid., p. 86.

The testimony of the Spirit of adoption does not be properly in this, that we believe to be true what the Scriptures testify (for this is known also to the devils and many of the lost), but rather in this-- that each applies to himself the promise of salvation in Christ of which Paul speaks in Romans VIII. 15, 16.²⁴

The Lutheran Hollaz echoes the thought of Beza on this point:

The testimony of the Holy Spirit is the supernatural act (*actus supernaturalis*) of the Holy Spirit by means of the Word of God alternatively read or heard . . . by which the heart of man is moved, opened, illuminated, turned to the obedience of faith, so that the illuminated man out of these internal spiritual movements truly perceives the Word which is propounded to him to have proceeded from God, and gives it therefore his unwavering assent.²⁵

Thus the *testimonium* is directly primarily at the heart of man with the effect on the mind being a consequent of the change of the disposition of the heart. The *testimonium* is not a secret new argument or separate cognitive revelation which supplements the *indicia*. No new content is transmitted to the believer's mind by the *testimonium*. The *testimonium*, as Warfield points out "is not a propositional revelation, but an instinctive 'sense.'"²⁶

NEO-ORTHODOX VIEWS OF THE *TESTIMONIUM*

With the advent of "dialectical," "crisis," or "neo-orthodox" views of Scripture, a noticeable shift occurred in thinking concerning the *testimonium*. In reaction against a formal, objectivized view of Scripture, neo-orthodoxy offered a more kinetic or dynamic view of Scripture and revelation.

Over against a schema which views the Bible as the Word of God in *esse* the neo-orthodox school located the objectivity of the Word of God uniquely in the Person of Christ. He alone "embodies" or incarnates the Word. Revelation occurs as the Spirit speaks to us through the *instrument* of Scripture. Scripture is not revelation but a *vehicle* of or witness (*zeugnis*) to revelation. It becomes revelatory as the Spirit speaks through it. The Scripture, then, is a vehicle of the Divine-Human encounter. Without the activity of the Spirit the Scripture cannot be viewed as objective revelation.

For Calvin the *testimonium* results in a subjective acquiescence to an objective revelation. The Bible is the Word of God with or without the internal testimony. For neo-orthodoxy, the Bible is not the Word of God *in essence* but a vehicle

²⁴Ibid., p. 77.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 80.

of revelation. It may or may not be the Word of God depending on the testimony of the Spirit. Objectivity is restricted to Christ but does not extend to the biblical writings.

Following the lead of Martin Kahler,²⁷ Emil Brunner writes:

I believe, however, in contrast to the Apostle, in Jesus Christ *by means of* that which He proclaims to me by the Apostle, who bears witness to Christ. The witness of the Apostle is an *instrument* of the divine revelation to me. But I do not give credence to the witness of the Apostle because the Apostle is represented to me as a trustworthy witness, and because I have already been assured that he is "inspired"; but I believe his witness at the same moment that I believe in the Christ to whom he testifies since his witness becomes to me the Word of God through the fact that God, through His Spirit, permits it to dawn on me as the Word of His truth . . . In one act of revelation there is created within me faith in Christ, and faith in the Scriptures which testify of Him . . . The Scriptures are indeed the first of the means which God uses, but they are not the first *object* of faith, nor are they the *ground* of my faith. The ground, the authority, which moves me to faith is no other than Jesus Christ Himself, as He speaks to me from the pages of the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit, as my Lord and my Redeemer. This is what men of old used to call the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum*.²⁸

Time out! On the contrary, this is *not* what men of old used to call the *testimonium*. As we have shown above the function of the *testimonium* is not to provide us with revelatory content but to provide us with certainty and assurance that the Bible is the revelatory Word of God.

We quite agree with Brunner that the Scriptures are not the object of our faith. Brunner, here is guarding against any form of Bibliolatry, in which faith in the Bible supplants faith in Christ. But it is one thing to say the Bible is not the *object* of our faith and quite another to say the Bible does not contain *objective revelation* of the object of my faith. Brunner *et al.* throw out the baby with the bathwater and leave us ensnarled in an existential quagmire of subjectivity.

Emphasizing the "event" of revelation in terms of personal encounter²⁹ Brunner goes on to describe the dynamics of the revelation experience:

²⁷See Martin Kahler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, trans. Carl E. Bracten (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

²⁸Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 168ff.

²⁹See Brunner's more comprehensive treatment of this in *The Divine Human Encounter*, trans. Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943).

The revelation in Jesus Christ produces the *illumination* in my heart and mind, so that I can now see: that this man is the Christ. Suddenly, all the barriers of time and space have faded away; I have become 'contemporary' with Christ. . . .³⁰ He is no more external than my faith is external. The sense of spatial and temporal remoteness, all external objectivity, has disappeared: He who previously spoke to me only from the outside now speaks within me through the Holy Spirit . . . The knowledge of the Scriptures as the Word of God is the same as the experience of the Holy Spirit. The truth is neither subjective nor objective, but it is both at once; it is the truth which may be described in other words, as the encounter of the human "I" with God's "thou" in Jesus Christ.³¹

Shades of Kierkegaard and truth as subjectivity. Brunner says that truth is not subjective. This would seem to relieve him of the charge of *subjectivism*. But then he maintains that the truth is not *objective* either. This would seem to warrant the charge. But then he says it is *both* at once. How do we understand this?

Perhaps all that Brunner means is that truth contains both an objective and subjective element. Maybe what we have here is a restatement of Calvin that the Bible is objectively the Word of God to which the Spirit moves us to make a subjective, personal response. All truth is "personal" in the sense that for it to have subjective meaning for me I must have some kind of personal response to it, either positively or negatively. But Brunner has already made it clear that is not what he means. Truth as such is not objective but dynamic and personal. This is a kind of *personalism* which redefines the nature of truth. Here truth is not truth until or unless the personal dimension is added. Here we see the crisis of *propositional* revelation which was triggered by the neo-orthodox movement.

No one would argue that biblical truth demands personal response, that is axiomatic. The issue is, do we have an objective revelatory truth to respond to?

Thomas Torrance develops the concept of the role of the Spirit in relationship to the Word in his essay, "The Epistemological Relevance of the Holy Spirit." He initiates this study by saying, "The epistemological relevance of the Holy Spirit lies in the dynamic and trans-formal aspects of this knowledge."³²

Following a similar phenomenological pattern of thought as Brunner in which the accent is on the kinetic experimental character of revelation Torrance says:

³⁰Compare this concept of "contemporary" with Kierkegaard's concept of the "moment" and Bultmann's theology of timelessness with the emphasis on *hic et nunc* encounter.

³¹Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, pp. 170-171.

³²Thomas F. Torrance, "The Epistemological Relevance of the Holy Spirit," in *Ex Auditū Verbi*, ed. R. Schippers, G. E. Meuleman, J. T. Balcher, and H. M. Kuitert (Kampen: Kolc, 1965), p. 273.

On the one hand, then, the Holy Spirit through His presence brings the very Being of God to bear upon us in our experience, creating the relation to the divine Being which knowledge of God requires in order to be knowledge, but on the other hand the Spirit through His ineffable and self-effacing nature reinforces the impossibility of our conceiving in thought and expressing in speech how our thought and speech are related to God, so that our thoughts and statements by referring infinitely beyond themselves break off before Him in wonder, adoration and silence, that God may be in All in all. Through the Spirit empirical relation to the divine Being takes place and within it we are given intuitive knowledge of God, but mode of our relation to Him and the mode of our knowledge of Him must be in accordance with His nature as *Spirit*, and therefore even though we have empirical relation to Him and intuitive knowledge of Him, they are not amenable to the kind of control which we exercise in relation to creaturely objects. It is rather we who fall under the overwhelming presence of the divine Being and come under the control of His spirit in our experience and knowledge of Him.³³

With Torrance the accent is on kinetic, trans-formal, experimental, intuitive knowledge of God via the Spirit and the Word. With this accent it is not surprising to see Torrance liken his approach to that of Heidegger. He says, "We may want to compare it to Heidegger's leap of thought to open up the original source of being."³⁴

Thus to escape formalism or objectivism the Spirit becomes the springboard to a trans-propositional knowledge of God. From this shift in understanding of Calvin's *testimonium* we readily see how the next critical problem of theology became the God-talk controversy which culminated in the death of God movement. If the content of revelation (not merely the internal assurance of its veracity) becomes separated from objectivity there is no avoiding the crisis of linguistic analysis. The "dynamic" of "kinetic thinking" leaves us with intuition. But what about cognitive knowledge of God?

It is the internal dimension of the *testimonium* which makes it vulnerable to a subjectivistic bent. If the *testimonium* has reference to the revelation itself rather than an inner assurance which corroborates external objective evidence (*indicia*) there remains no authority above and beyond the private experience of the believing individual. If the Word becomes subject to the internal dynamics of the believing individual it becomes no longer the objective Word of God but the subjective word of Man. This is a grave crisis inherent in an existential approach to revelation.

For Calvin the believing individual makes a subjective response to the objective Word through the impetus of the Spirit. For the existentialist,

³³ Ibid., p. 282.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 283.

the subjective response determines the Word as it only becomes the Word of God through the kinetic activity of the Spirit.

Though Orthodoxy faces a modern intramural debate regarding the apologetic value and function of the *testimonium*, there is a monolithic consensus among those divided over apologetics in the objective, propositional character of the Bible as the Word of God.

THE NEW TESTAMENT BASIS FOR THE TESTIMONIUM

The New Testament does not provide us with a thorough-going exposition of the Internal Testimony as such. This, at face value, could expose Calvin, Luther, and a host of other theologians to the charge that the doctrine has been constructed on the basis of speculative philosophy or by a "system" of theology imposed on the Scriptures arbitrarily. However, the New Testament is replete with allusions to the work of the Spirit in securing our confidence in the Word.³⁵ These references are scattered throughout the New Testament and include such classic texts as 2 Cor. 4:3-6; 1 John 1:10, 2:14, 5:20; Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 1:5; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-16; and others.

The work of revelation, illumination, and persuasion are carried on from a Trinitarian framework ranging from the Father's revealing Jesus' messianic identity to Peter at Caesarea Phillipi (Matt. 16:17), to Jesus' revelation of the things taught Him by the Father in secret (John 12), to the work of the Spirit in illumination. Though all members of the Trinity are active in this redemptive operation, it is the work of the Holy Spirit which is stressed by the New Testament.

Consider 1 Corinthians 2 as a classic text for the *testimonium*:

And my speech and my preaching were not in the persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. We speak wisdom, however, among them that are full grown: Yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to nought: but we speak God's wisdom on a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the rulers of this world hath known: for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory: but as it is written, things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, And which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men

³⁵For an excellent comprehensive survey of the biblical texts relevant to the discussion see Bernard Ramm's, *The Witness of the Spirit*, pp. 42-61.

knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man,
which is in him? even so the things of God none
knoweth, save the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. 2:5-11)

The theme of this passage is the supremacy of the power of God in revelation. The Spirit searches things which go beyond what the senses perceive. Our faith is said to "stand" in the power of God. God reveals the secret things of Himself *through* the *Spirit*. The Holy Spirit mediates the Word. As the Apostle notes later:

Which things also we speak, not in words which man's
wisdom teacheth; but which the Spirit teacheth;
combining spiritual things with spiritual words. (1 Cor. 2:13)

Here Paul links the Apostolic words with the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is not mentioned merely as the *source* of the content, but as the basis of the *persuasive power* of the words.

The same emphasis on revelation and persuasion may be seen in 2 Corinthians 3:1-11. The writing of the Spirit on the Christian's heart is not viewed as a gnostic esoteric experience, but a powerful penetration of the heart of the truth of the content of God's revelation.³⁶

The internal testimony is not an isolated work of the Spirit ripped loose from the written word. Rather, as the Trinity works in harmony to effect our redemption, so the Spirit bears witness and testifies to us inwardly of the whole content of divine revelation.

³⁶See Philip Edgcumbe Hughes' *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* in the N.I.C. series for an exposition of this section.

THE VIEW OF THE BIBLE HELD BY THE CHURCH: THE EARLY CHURCH THROUGH LUTHER

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PAPER SUMMARY

The doctrine of verbal inspiration and the inerrancy and divine authority of Scripture has been the consistent teaching of the Christian church from the time of the apostles through the early church and Middle Ages to the Reformation era. A remarkable unity of belief and even terminology persists through the centuries relative to this doctrine, which appears to be taken in every case from the teachings of the New Testament itself. At the time of the Reformation a new evangelical reading of Scripture and a much stronger emphasis on the sole authority of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*), reminiscent of the New Testament itself take definite shape.

THE VIEW OF THE BIBLE HELD BY THE CHURCH: THE EARLY CHURCH THROUGH LUTHER

Robert D. Preus

I.

That the Bible is the Word of God, inerrant and of supreme divine authority is a conviction held by all Christians and Christian teachers through the first 1700 years of church history. Except in the case of certain free thinking scholastics such as Abelard and the case of Luther this fact has not really been contested by many scholars. Of course, many of the early church fathers and an even greater proportion of the Medieval theologians did not directly address themselves to the subject of biblical authority. In the case of the former the doctrine of biblical authority was simply assumed on the basis of an understanding of Scripture shared by both the Tannaite Judaism and the early Christians. In the case of the latter there developed a notable lack of interest in biblical studies and in seeking answers directly from Scripture for questions and concerns of the day. In any case the view of Scripture as inspired by the Spirit of God and therefore possessing divine authority and inerrancy was not a creation of early Judaism or of early Christian thought but an inheritance of an obvious truth taught in the Scriptures. Not until the divine origin or authority or veracity of Scripture were somehow undermined or threatened do these issues receive direct attention from Christian theologians.

But just as we can establish Scripture's teaching of its own divine origin and authority on the basis of what is assumed rather than explicitly articulated there, in similar manner we can clearly delineate the doctrine concerning Scripture held by the Christian church and its theological leaders from the post-apostolic times through the Reformation era. In fact, this has already been done repeatedly and by eminent scholars during the past century,¹ and

¹The entire history of the development of the doctrine concerning Scripture was treated by two nineteenth century theologians, W. Rohnert, *Die Inspiration der heiligen Schrift und ihre Bestreiter* (Leipzig: Verlag von Georg Böhme, 1889), and Wilhelm Koelling, *Die Lehre von der Theopneustie* (Breslau: Verlag von Carl Dülfer, 1891). Similar studies have been carried out by Roman Catholic theologians who write more briefly on the subject, but offer massive evidence. I refer to Sebastianus Tromp, *De Sacrae Scripturae Inspiratione* (Rome: Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1953) and Cardinal Autustinus Bea, *De Inspiratione et Inerrantia Sacrae Scripturae* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1954); *De Scripturae Inspiratione. Quaestiones Historicae et Dogmaticae* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1935). Although none of these studies is particularly penetrating but each is meant only to be an overview of the doctrine through the history of the Church, nevertheless each offers vast data to support a unity of belief concerning biblical inspiration and authority extending from apostolic times through the sixteenth and

except for the case of Luther the conclusions have all been that a remarkable unity persists through this long period. On no other point do we notice such unanimity, except perhaps on the issues of dichotomy and the forbidden degrees of marriage,² inherited positions that were never seriously questioned and therefore simply assumed to be true.

It is significant that the church and synagogue in the post-apostolic age held essentially the same view of Scripture. Normative Tannaite Judaism professed to teach nothing but what was taught explicitly or implicitly in the Old Testament Scriptures. Although their hermeneutical principles and interpretation were different from that of the New Testament writers and the early church fathers, their understanding of the nature of biblical authority seems to be the same. Both parties believed that the contents of the Scriptures were consistent and homogeneous. There were no contradictions in Scripture. Scripture was considered to be the Word of God in the sense of representing a verbal, cognitive revelation. The idea of progressive revelation was impossible, if by such a notion it was thought that a complete and saving revelation was not given to Moses.³ For early Judaism there was a complete correspondence

¹seventeenth centuries. Excellent monographs have also been written on the bibliography of specific church fathers and theologians. On Augustine A. D. R. Polman's *The Word of God according to St. Augustine*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961) is perhaps the best study, clearing up many previous misunderstandings. See also Charles Joseph Costello, *St. Augustine's Doctrine on the Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1930). The bibliography of the Patristic period is touched on by several good Patrologies: Bertold Altaner, *Patrology*, trans. Hilda C. Graef (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959); Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Niel Buchanan (London: Williams and Norgate, 1896); Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Utrecht: Spectrum, no date); F. Cayré, *Manuel of Patrology* (Paris: Desclée, 1940). For the Medieval period see Martin Grabmann, *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben* (Munich: M. Hueber, 1926); Frederik Copelston, *A History of Philosophy* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1953-). The two best books on Luther are, in German Wilhelm Walther, *Das Erbe der Reformation* (Leipzig: A. Duchert, 1918), and, in English Michael Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1944). Reu borrows heavily from Walther. A recent work on Luther's hermeneutics is also most valuable, and, like Reu and Walther, a corrective of many nineteenth and early twentieth century caricatures of Luther's position: E. Thestrup Pedersen, *Luther som Skriftfortolker* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1959). Copious bibliographies and references to further secondary sources are found in many of the above works.

²See John Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (Tuebingen, 1787, Cotta Ed.) 17.80ff.; 15.253ff.

³For a thorough treatment of early normative Judaism's doctrine of Scripture and revelation see George Foot Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917) 1.235-262, still considered to be the most complete and scholarly treatment of the subject. Moore also points out how early Judaism and early Christian thought differ in their interpretation of Scripture. Cf. H. Strack and B. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Muenchen: Beck, 1928) 4.415-451: "Excurs: Der Kanon des Alten Testaments und seine Inspiration."

and agreement between Moses and the prophetic books and Hagiographa, which explain the Pentateuch; for the early Christians the New Testament explains the Old. Except for this latter difference, Christ and the New Testament writers regard the Old Testament in much the same way, although interpreting it always Christologically, as did the early church after the time of the apostles.

As a matter of fact, the early Christian Fathers, the Apostolic Fathers, and the Apologists, always accepted the Old Testament as divinely inspired and authoritative, long before the entire New Testament canon was accepted; and, like the apostles in the book of Acts, they consistently cited the Old Testament as divinely authoritative for their proclamation of the Christian Gospel. In fact, the Old Testament was a specifically Christian book, belonging to the church, not the synagog, for it witnessed to Christ and His glory (1 Pet. 1:10-12).⁴ The Apologists were in fact brought to faith in Christ through their reading of the Old Testament Scriptures, although it is usually safe to assume that they were persuaded by the Apostolic witness and understanding of the Old Testament. Ultimately Christ, the risen Lord, was the final interpreter of the Old Testament and His word was found in the apostolic tradition and the New Testament writings.⁵

Only after the time of the Apologists were the New Testament writings accepted along with Old Testament Scriptures. This shift took place as a result of the gradual acceptance of the New Testament canon. The New Testament was therefore considered to be completely authoritative along with the Old, and all Scripture was now seen as one unit. The New Testament was regarded as the divinely authoritative commentary on the Old.

Meanwhile, another position was beginning to take shape and become articulate. Along with a total commitment to the Scriptures as the norm of all doctrine, a new and clear conviction concerning the authority of oral tradition began to develop. This oral tradition, handed down from generation to generation and going back through the apostles directly to Christ, in no way conflicted with the Scriptures. But it did aid the church in interpreting the Scriptures and particularly in summarizing the Christian faith and thus protecting Christians against the aberrations of Gnostics and other heretics. To Tertullian and Irenaeus, who developed this position, such apostolic tradition which faithfully transmitted Christ's teaching was infallible, like Scripture.⁶ Thus, for all practical purposes we have at the turn of the third century a kind of two source doctrine of authority in the church with both the New Testament and rule of faith thought to be eminently apostolic.⁷ It is probably

⁴Justin, 1 *Apol.* 32, 2; *Dial.* 29, 2.

⁵Justin, 1 *Apol.* 42, 4; 67, 7; *Dial.* 53, 1.

⁶Tertullian, *De Praescript.* 21; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4, 26, 2. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), pp. 35-41 *passim*.

⁷Harry Wolfson in *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956) distinguishes between a "single faith theory" of Tertullian and Origen and a "double faith theory" taught by Clement of Alexandria and others. The latter theory places philosophy and theology on a kind of par as the basis of faith.

true that neither Tertullian nor Irenaeus meant to subordinate Scripture to unwritten tradition. In fact, only the Scripture could ultimately authenticate the tradition. But at the same time the on-going tradition was necessary to counteract heretical distortions and interpretations of Scripture. Thus, the two revelatory authorities, identical in content, complemented and authenticated each other. This position was held in a variety of forms from the third century until the time of the Reformation and after that time in the Roman Catholic Church. The position ultimately led to the teaching of the Council of Trent that Scripture and unwritten tradition--and this in effect often meant the church--were coordinate authorities for doctrine in the church.⁸ We must say, however, that in practice both the Eastern and Western Fathers as a rule gave much more deference to Scripture than to any rule of faith. Creeds were written on the basis of Scripture and in a most biblical terminology; and commentaries and treatises of all sorts were based on Scripture as the source of doctrine. Irenaeus himself in his *Adversus Haereses* cites Scripture no less than 1,200 times. And as a matter of principle he states, "We must believe God, who has given us the right understanding, since the Holy Scriptures are perfect, because they are spoken by the Word of God and the Spirit of God."⁹ And how else could Irenaeus and the other Fathers have done their theology? They could scarcely have quoted from an unwritten tradition.

But whereas Irenaeus might have alluded often to a rule of faith, with the passing of the Gnostic influence the later Fathers were far less reticent to quote directly from the Scriptures. This is true of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Although their writings are far more directly biblical, they still regarded the so-called rule of faith as having come directly from the apostles and as a rule for interpreting Scripture.¹⁰ And both believed that such a source of doctrine was independent of the New Testament, although the content of both was the same.¹¹

After Clement and Origen the vague idea of a canon of faith was gradually replaced by Creeds and the liturgy as the form of unwritten tradition which along with Scripture served as the basis of doctrine in the Church. But we must add that liturgy and especially the early Creeds were developed and constructed on the basis of Scripture. And if anything in the creeds or

⁸See Henrici Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. 31 (Rome: Herder, 1957), pp. 783-786. The extent to which this position can distort a true understanding of Scripture according to the authority and norms of ecclesiastical exegesis (thought to be unwritten divinely revealed tradition) is seen in recent times in *Vigilantiae*, the apostolic letter of Leo XIII in 1903 which states, "As we were saying, the nature of the divine books is such that in order to dissipate the religious obscurity with which they are shrouded we must never count on the laws of hermeneutics, but must address ourselves to the Church, which has been given by God to mankind as a guide and teacher." See *Rome and the Study of Scripture*, ed. Conrad Lewis, OSB (St. Meinrad, Ind.: Grail, 1958), p. 32.

⁹*Haer.* 2, 47. Cf. 3, 1.

¹⁰Clement, *Strom.* 7, 16, 93.

¹¹Origen, *De princ.* 3, 1, 1.

liturgy was thought to be unscriptural, such as the *homoeousios* in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, it was only with much difficulty accepted. We must note also that as time went on the great literary works of the Fathers were more and more expositions of the Scriptures; and their commentaries on the Creeds (such as that of Rufinus) were often intended to offer biblical evidence for the credal statements. To quote J. N. D. Kelly:

Throughout the whole period Scripture and tradition ranked as complementary authorities, media different in form but coincident in content. To inquire which counted as superior or more ultimate is to pose the question in misleading and anachronistic terms. If Scripture was abundantly sufficient in principle, tradition was recognized as the surest clue to its interpretation, for in tradition the Church retained, as a legacy from the apostles which was embedded in all the organs of her institutional life, an unerring grasp of the real purport and meaning of the revelation to which Scripture and tradition alike bore witness.¹²

The basis for Scripture's divine authority according to all the early Church Fathers is its divine origin and form. Scripture is the Word of God. This unanimous conviction of the early church that Scripture is God's Word was not borrowed from ancient Judaism, but from the New Testament which speaks of the God-breathed nature of Scripture (1 Tim. 3:16) and of the holy writers as instruments of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). The Fathers assumed that Scripture was the Word of God and treated it thus, just as the New Testament writers had done in the case of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Christian Fathers differed from the early Jews concerning the origin of the Torah. The Jews believed that the Torah was created by God thousands of years before the creation of the world, that in time it was given by God directly to Moses without the mediation of the Spirit. Thus Rabbinic theology distinguished the Torah from the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures, although all of Scripture was believed to have been inspired. The early Christians did not share this Rabbinic view of the Torah. Nor did they, for the most part, engage in the same kind of wooden and fanciful exegesis so common among the Jews, as seen in the Talmud. Their keen Christological understanding of the Old Testament, in any event, kept them from the almost total preoccupation with juristic exegesis so typical to the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel and also of later Tannaite Judaism.

What then precisely did the early Christians mean when they called Scripture the Word of God? Put quite simply, they believed that God is the real author of the Scriptures.¹³ The books of Scripture were commonly ascribed to the Holy Spirit as the one who wrote them.¹⁴ The human writers were instruments

¹² *Early Doctrines*, pp. 47-48.

¹³ *Enchiridion Biblicum*, 23, 26, 27, 28, 32, 42, 62, 66, 110, 116. Ambrose, *Ep.* 8, 10 (PL 16, 953); Augustine, *Cont. Fauss.* 15, 1 (PL 11, 295): *Cont. Adimantum*, 16, 3 (PL 42, 157).

¹⁴ Jerome, *Ep.* 70, 7; *Is.* 29, 9ff. Origen, *Cont. Celts.* 59ff.; Tertullian, *Apol.* 18; Augustine, *Adv. Marc.* 4, 22. Cf. Rohnert, *Die Inspiration*, 95.

of the Holy Spirit. Both Augustine and Ambrose explicitly called God the author of Scripture against the Manichaeans. By the term "author" they meant one who produces or effects something. This is precisely what God did in respect to Scripture; in this sense God authored all the Scriptures.¹⁵ And in precisely this sense the Scriptures are unique, differing from all other writings and possessing qualities and attributes (authority, truthfulness) which are unique by virtue of the Scripture's origin and nature.

If Scripture is really and truly, not in some metaphorical or metonymical sense, the Word of God, what then is the function of the human authors of Scripture, according to the Fathers of the early Church? Or, to pose the question differently, what is the relation between the Holy Spirit and the holy writers as they wrote the Scriptures? Or, to pose the identical question in still a different form, what is the notion of inspiration taught by the church Fathers? Historically the term "inspiration" has been applied to both Scripture ("Scripture is inspired," the product of God's breath, θεόπνευστος, 2 Tim. 3:16) and to the prophets and apostles ("the writers of Scripture were inspired," θερόμενοι, moved by the Holy Spirit, 2 Pet. 1:21). Interestingly, Jerome translated both the θεόπνευστος of 2 Timothy 3:16 and the θερόμενοι of 2 Peter 1:21 with the same Latin term (*inspirata*, *inspirati*), thus causing a certain amount of confusion, unless one using Latin distinguished between the inspiration of the Scriptures and the inspiration (something quite different) of the holy writers. The question we are posing deals with the second meaning of the term.

Usually the Greek Fathers spoke of the relation of the Spirit to the writers of Scripture when they employed the term "inspired" and its synonyms.¹⁶ The term was already in use in the Hellenistic world, along with similar terms such as θεόφορος, θεοφόρητος, θεοφοροδύμενος, θεήλατος, θεοδίδακτος, θεοκίνητος, and the like. The terms meant simply that a person entered a state in which by divine impulse he spoke clearly, truthfully, profoundly a divine message. But in the Hellenistic world the idea of inspiration went further in that such a state was ordinarily typified by a kind of μάντις or μανία, an ecstasy accompanied by all kinds of bizarre oddities such as foaming at the mouth, hair standing on end, and the like. Such inspiration was often engendered by narcotics and usually resulted in a complete loss of memory. Nor did the experience have any cognitive content. The early Christians envisaged something quite different when they spoke of the inspiration of the holy writers of Scripture. Before the time of Tertullian and the Montanists, the Apologists and others may have spoken in somewhat unguarded terms as they referred to the relation of the Holy Spirit to the human writers of Scripture. And they may well have uncritically borrowed phrases from Philo who drew deeply from Hellenistic religious thought as he likened the experience of Moses and other writers of Scripture to the psychological behavior common to the mystery religions of his day. They indeed, along with the later Greek and Latin Fathers, employed the idea of inspiration in a variety of contexts

¹⁵Cf. Bea, *De Inspiratione*, pp. 11-12. Cf. Bea, "Deus auctor Sacrae Scripturae: Herkunft und Bedeutung der Formel," *Angelicum* 20 (1943), pp. 16-31.

¹⁶Bea, *De Inspiratione*, pp. 3ff. Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) under θεόπνευστος and related terms.

not suggested by biblical terms and concepts. And they taught, as indeed both Old and New Testaments witness, that the gift of prophecy was at times bestowed to one while in an ecstatic condition. But there is no evidence to suggest that they, and particularly those who followed the Montanist enthusiastic heresy, sought to psychologize the inspired writers of Scripture.¹⁷ And surely among the early Christian writers there was no simple apposition or identification of philosophy and revelation, of prophecy and ecstatic enthusiasm, as in the case of Philo.

What then was the relation of the writers of Scripture to the Holy Spirit in the theology of the early church? The human writers were the *instruments*, the organs, of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Augustine consistently used the ablative for the work of the Holy Spirit and the preposition "*per*" for that of the biblical authors,¹⁹ thus clearly bringing out the instrumental part played by the prophets and apostles in the writing of Scripture. God is the *auctor primarius*, the actual author of Scripture, and the biblical writers His organs through whom He speaks. This is precisely the picture presented in the New Testament (Matt. 1:22; 2:6, 17; 3:3; 4:14; Acts 2:16; 4:25). And the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed echoes the same theme when it describes the Holy Spirit as speaking through the prophets (διὰ τῶν προφητῶν). When the Fathers use certain metaphores to illustrate the instrumentality of the biblical writers, metaphores such as flute, lyre, musical instrument, hand and the like,²⁰ their imagery must not be pushed beyond the point of comparison. They are not suggesting that all inspiration takes place in a state of ecstasy. They are not suggesting that the human authors of Scripture are unthinking, unwilling instruments, divested of their consciousness or personality or *usus scribendi*. On the contrary they at times affirm a συγκατάβασις (Chrysostom) of the Spirit whereby He condescends or accommodates Himself to styles and

¹⁷One must take issue with Hermann Sasse at this point. See "Sacra Scriptura, Bemerkungen zur Inspirationslehre Augustins" in *Festschrift Franz Dormseiff*, ed. Horst Kusch (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1953), pp. 262-273. Sasse contends that not only Athenagoras (*Legatio pro Christianis* 9) and Pseudo-Justin (*Cohortatio ad Graecos* 8, 37), with their unfortunate comparison of biblical inspiration with the description of the Sibyl of Cumae in the sixth book of the Aeneid, but also Augustine copied Philo's doctrine of inspiration. Polman and Kelly deny this, and with more than ample evidence. The fact that Augustine for apologetic reasons compares (*De consen evang.* 1, pp. 19ff.) the inspiration of Sibyl with that of the prophets and apostles affects neither his doctrine of inspiration nor his exegesis of Scripture. Actually, Augustine's apologetics is formally quite like that of Elijah on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18).

¹⁸Athanagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.*, 7 (PG 6, 386); Theophilus of Antioch, *autolye.* 2, 9. 10 (PG 6, 1063); Jerome, *Ep.* 65, 7 (PL 22, 627); Gregory the Great, *in Job, praef.* 1 (PL 75, 515). Cf. Heb. 3:7; 10:15.

¹⁹Polman, *The Word*, p. 51.

²⁰Athanagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.*, 9; Pseudo-Justin, *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, 8; Chrysostom, *in Joh. hom.* 1, 1; Hippolytus, *De Antichristo* 2 (PG 6, 386). Jerome, *Ep.* 65, 7 (PL 22, 627); *De Ps.* 88.

personalities of the biblical writers.²¹ Thus, they take into account the endowments, the thought forms, the *genus loquendi* of the different writers of Scripture. Augustine, for instance, in his *De Consensu Evangelistarum* makes this fact abundantly clear, and he notes often the very human motives and selectivity which prompted the evangelists to write as they did.²² Origen repudiates any comparison between the inspiration of the biblical writers and the ecstatic oracles of paganism.²³

And so to the Fathers of the early church, with the possible exception of the pre-Montanist apologists, the total control of the Spirit over the penmen is perfectly compatible with the conscious and willing use by the holy writers of their unique endowments and style of writing. The flute, lyre, instrument terminology was employed only to stress the instrumentality of the human authors and the monergism of divine inspiration. One might say that contributively the biblical writers were passive--the Spirit alone supplied to them what they were to write, its very form and content; but subjectively or psychologically (if one might use such a loaded modern term) the biblical writers were active, in full and conscious possession of their faculties. Nowhere do the Fathers try to bridge this paradox; nowhere do they seem to be troubled by it or even aware of it. They simply accept the mystery of divine inspiration.

Again it has been averred that the practice of Augustine and others in using the verb *dictate* to describe the Holy Spirit's activity in communicating the form and content of the sacred writings to the holy writers is tantamount to teaching a mechanical theory of inspiration, reminiscent of Montanism.²⁴ Actually Augustine uses such terms as *inspirare*, *dictare*, *suggerere*, and *gubernare* all interchangeably and in a large variety of contexts. All verbs are used in a broader and narrower context; and in the narrower sense the verbs could all best be translated by *give*, *charge*, *communicate*, *direct*, *incite*.²⁵ The use of these various verbs was calculated to stress once again that in the writing of Scripture the initiative was God's alone, that He monergistically determined what was to be written in Scripture, and that the resultant Scriptures are His Word.

And so, whether the Fathers speak of the inspiration of the writers of Scripture or of the inspiration of the Bible itself, they are affirming one

²¹In Genesis 2:21 (PG 53, 121; 24, 135).

²²See Polman, *The Word*, pp. 47-51.

²³*Cont. Cels.* 7, 3.

²⁴Sasse, "Sacra Scriptura," p. 267. Sasse says that the term *dictare* reduces the inspired writer to a mere tool of the Holy Spirit like a typewriter, whereas *suggerere* includes human cooperation (of some kind). Hence there is an ambivalence in Augustine's doctrine.

²⁵Polman, *The Word*, pp. 44-46, proves this point conclusively. Cf. my book, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957), pp. 71-73, where exactly the same conclusion is drawn on the basis of the Latin works of Lutheran orthodoxy as the post-Reformation Lutherans employed the same terminology as Augustine and the Western Church Fathers.

fundamental truth, that Scripture is really and truly God's Word, all of it, even its minute details.²⁶ And therefore Scripture was divinely authoritative--and infallibly true.

Correlative to Scripture's divine origin and authority is its utter truthfulness and reliability. This was the universal conviction of the early church. Never was there any doubt concerning the inerrancy of Scripture. The notion of an errant Word of God was unthinkable in those days. True, the fanciful exegesis often employed, the allegorical method and the search for a *sensus plenior* indicate often, no doubt, the difficulty the Fathers had with the plain meaning of many biblical assertions. Augustine in his *De Consensu Evangelistarum* struggled with the seeming discrepancies among the evangelists and with the New Testament's seeming preference for the sometimes errant Septuagint over the authentic Hebrew text of the Old Testament; and he came far from solving these problems. But never in those days was a difficulty encountered by the study of Scripture solved by charging Scripture with error or untruth. Never was the unity of Scripture and Scripture's agreement with itself questioned. In fact, the inerrancy of Scripture was not merely assumed,²⁷ but affirmed deliberately and dogmatically. Thus, we find Augustine saying that the Scriptures are unique in their inerrancy:

Only to those books which are called canonical have I learned to give honor so that I believe most firmly that no author in these books made any error in writing . . . I read other authors not with the thought that what they have taught and written is true just because they have manifested holiness and learning.²⁸

And Jerome makes many similar assertions.²⁹ When Augustine and Jerome speak of the truthfulness of Scripture they include both the formal inerrancy of Scripture (that Scripture does not contradict itself) and the material truthfulness of Scripture (that all the assertions of Scripture correspond to what obtains).³⁰ According to the Fathers Scripture is *a priori* true, irrefragably so. Scriptures need no verification of any kind from some outside authority. Hence we find Jerome stating with certainty:

When you are really instructed in the Divine Scriptures, and have realized that its laws and testimonies are the bonds of truth, then you can contend with adversaries;

²⁶For the doctrine of plenary inspiration in the Fathers see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, p. 61.

²⁷Clement of Rome, *1 Cor.* 45, 2 (PG I, 30); Chrysostom, *in Ps.* 4, 11 (PG 55, 57), See Tromp, *De Sacrae*, pp. 125-126.

²⁸*Epist.* 82, 1, 3; Cf. *Epist.* 8 (ad Hieronymum), 3, 3.

²⁹For a listing and discussion of these statements see the encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XV commemorating the fifteenth centenary of the death of St. Jerome, entitled, "Spiritus Paraclitus" and found in Lewis, *Rome*, pp. 43ff.

³⁰Tromp, *De Sacrae*, pp. 125ff.

then you will fetter them and lead them bound into captivity; then of the foes you have made captive you will make freemen of God.³¹

II.

The decline and fall of the Roman empire, first in the West and then East, was accompanied by a virtual cessation of any theological output of substance. The development of dogma was permanently frozen in the East with the classic *De Fide Orthodoxa* of John of Damascus. In the West serious and constructive theological production was arrested from the sixth century until the rise of scholastic theology. And it was the discovery of Aristotle and the desire to coordinate theology with all human knowledge which originally incited the scholastics to engage in their monumental productions. Exegetical work was scarcely carried on. In the West neither of the biblical languages was known.

It is understandable therefore that no original contribution or advance in the area of bibliology would take place. The scholastics inherited the position of their forerunners. But if a somewhat consistent bibliology is only adumbrated in the early church, it is scarcely discernible in the scholastic era. One may range through thousands of pages of scholastic theology to find any explicit or direct word concerning the divine origin, authority or truthfulness of Scripture. The doctrine concerning Scripture *per se* among the scholastics can only be extracted from their prolegomenous discussions where they center their attention primarily on questions of epistemology and discuss man's return to God, revelation, prophetic knowledge, and similar themes. Their discussion of inspiration as a supernatural charism is carried on out of epistemological and anthropological concerns.³²

Although there is a real paucity of evidence to demonstrate a clear and explicit scholastic position concerning the *locus de scriptura*, the following resume of the greater of the Medieval scholastic theologians' views on this point will reveal a definite position concerning the Scriptures and illustrate

³¹*Ep. ad Fabiolam*, 78, 30, cited in Lewis, *Rome*, p. 48. Cf. *Ep. ad Theophilum*, 82, 7, 2, cited in Lewis, *Rome*, p. 49: "The apostles are one thing, other writers another; the former always tell the truth, the latter--as being mere men--sometimes err." The fact that church fathers such as Chrisostom and Jerome clearly taught that the Holy Spirit accommodated Himself to the *usus loquendi*, the natural endowments and concerns of the human authors of Scripture (as well as to the concerns and needs of the readers of Scripture) never implies that in their opinion God ever accommodated Himself to error as He inspired men to write His Word.

³²The best discussion of Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of inspiration is by Pierre Benoit in Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration* (New York: Desclee Co., 1961). Benoit's main thesis is to demonstrate against J. B. Franzelin, *Tractatus de divina traditione et Scriptura* (Rome, 1870) that Thomas in fact taught a doctrine of verbal inspiration. Others who write concerning the scholastic doctrine concerning Scripture have very little to say (e.g., Bea, Rohnert, Koelling, et al.).

that there is no considerable difference between the theology of the thirteenth century and the fifth century on this point.

Anselm³³

No doctrine of bibliology or the Word is articulate in Anselm. Although in his three best known works (*Proslogion*, *Monologion*, *Cur Deus Homo?*) he is speculating as a philosopher--for he is proving rationally those things which are already accepted on faith--still behind such dialectics lies an implicit reliance upon what we would call the Scripture principle. When he says at the beginning of his *Proslogion* that in believing we seek to understand (*credo ut intelligam*), his idea is simply this: it is proper for faith to seek to understand. We may never understand, Anselm grants; but if we do understand it will be because we have started with faith. And faith, of course, depends upon the divine revelation of Scripture. Here Anselm has distinguished himself as a faithful student of Augustine; and he is not consciously going beyond Augustine in any respect. The fact that he is conceding to his students in working out certain doctrines dialectically may deceive us into thinking that he is a rationalist, but this is not so. He is not trying to strip revelation of its mystery, but to penetrate the mysteries so far as can be done. With Anselm no clear distinction is made between theology and philosophy.

Alexander of Hales³⁴

Alexander is a little more articulate. In his *Summa Theologica* he speaks somewhat of Scripture in his prolegomena. He insists that Scripture has a purpose greater than other histories (I,1). The history there recorded is not merely to point to individual actions of men, but to assess general actions and conditions which serve to inform men and enable them to contemplate divine mysteries. Thus he sees in Scripture a salutary diagnostic purpose and function. The examples Alexander uses to illustrate his point are perhaps not the most fortunate: the death of Abel signifies the innocent suffering of Christ and other just people, while the wickedness of Cain represents the perversity of the unrighteous.

The mode (*modus*) of the art or science of Scripture--we might call this "theology"--is not according to the usual comprehension of the rational mind. Theology (*modus Scripturae artis*) obtains by means of the arrangement of divine wisdom which informs the soul in those things which pertain to salvation (*per dispositionem divinae sapientiae ad informationem animae in iis quae pertinent ad salutem*). If this seems to be pure intellectualism, we must remember that Alexander is speaking of theology as art or science (*scientia*), that is, as communicable. The Franciscans were not intellectualists, but voluntarists (I,1).

³³Anselm of Canterbury. *Opera Omnia* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), vols. 1 and 2.

³⁴Alexander of Hales. *Summa Theologica* (Rome: ad claras aquas, 1924-48).

What he means by theology as information is made more clear (I,5) when he goes on to say that the knowledge which we gain through inspiration is more certain than what we gain through human rationalizing, and the knowledge we gain through the testimony of the Spirit more sure than what we gain by the witness of creatures. The former certainty is the certainty of the spiritual man as opposed to the carnal man. *Modus theologiae est certior certitudine experientiae*: "The method of theology is more certain than a certitude drawn from experience." The carnal man has no knowledge but *experimento sensibilium*; the spiritual man has a certainty which is due to his possessing the spirit of contemplating divine things. The conclusion is that only knowledge given in Scripture offers absolute, or we might say, divine, certainty. This emphasis of the Franciscan school that knowledge (*cognitio*) is not simply intellectual is shared by Luther and the Reformers.

Bonaventura³⁵

Little data can be gathered from Bonaventura. He is in the Franciscan school and would follow Alexander. Like the earlier Franciscans he did not differentiate closely between theology and philosophy. He simply insisted that there is no philosophy which was not oriented in God. Philosophy begins with the visible effects and argues to God, but it must always comport with revealed theology which is drawn from Scripture. Thus there was only a methodological distinction between the two sciences. The conclusions of both were the same. Hence the philosopher will, for instance, work out proofs for the existence of God, but only with the presupposition that he already believes in God. He does not make himself temporarily an atheist. In all this philosophy was the handmaid of theology, and all theology was drawn from Scripture.

Thomas Aquinas³⁶

Thomas is more explicit in his views of Scripture and its place in the theology of the church than any of the previously mentioned theologians. Again his views on Scripture are found in his prolegomena on the nature of *sacra doctrina*. He begins with a discussion of the necessity of revelation.

It was necessary for man's salvation that there be a certain doctrine according to divine revelation, truths which exceed human reason. Even regarding those truths which human reason can investigate it was necessary that man be taught by divine revelation. For the truth about God which is learned through reason would be known only by a few after a long time and with an admixture of errors; but the salvation of man depends upon his knowledge of this truth which is in God. Therefore, in order that salvation might the easier be brought to man and be more certain it was necessary that men be instructed concerning divine matters through divine revelation.

³⁵Bonaventura. *Opera Theologica Selecta* (Florence: Luaracchi, 1934).

³⁶Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* (Rome: Marietti, 1948).

This theology which is learned through revelation is different in kind (*secundum genus*) from the theology which philosophy deals with. Thomas next asks whether theology (*sacra doctrina*) is a science or whether it is a practical science. It is a science which proceeds from principles which proceed from a higher science; namely, the science of God. Because this science deals with God, it is a speculative science more than a practical science. The place of Scripture in theology is made quite plain by Thomas when he asks whether sacred doctrine is argumentative. All sciences argue from principles and do not try to prove their principles. Thus it is also with theology, whose principles (*principia*) are the articles of faith. In philosophy the lower sciences cannot dispute or prove the principles of a higher science. Sacred Scripture offers the highest science, a science *sui generis*. If a heretic or outsider admits any of the principles of Scripture one may argue with him with hope. In all such discussion faith in Scripture rests on infallible truth, and it is impossible to demonstrate any argument against such faith. Theology makes use of human reason, but only for the sake of clarification. "Therefore, sacred doctrine also makes use of human reason: not, however, to prove faith, for in such an event the very merit of faith would be vitiated, but to clarify (*ad manifestandum*) other things which are set forth in this doctrine." Thus theology will make use of philosophers in those matters which can be known by human reason, e.g., Paul quotes Aratus (Acts 17:28). Thomas then concludes the section:

However, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities (philosophers) only as extraneous and probable arguments. Properly theology uses the authorities of the canonical scripture as the necessary argumentation (*ex necessitate argumentando*). The authority of the doctors of the church is properly employed, but as merely probable (*probabiliter*). For our faith rests upon the revelation given to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on revelation (if there be such a thing) made to other teachers. Whence Augustine says in his letter to Jerome (82): "Only to those books which are called canonical have I learned to give honor so that I believe most firmly that no author in these books made any error in writing. I read other authors not with the thought that what they have thought and written is true just because they have manifested holiness and learning!"

This surely sounds like one who believes in the divine origin of Scripture and the *sola Scriptura* principle. Later Thomas says that the author of Sacred Scripture is God. Whatever may be his practice later, correct principles have been set down clearly in this prolegomena on the nature of theology. One aberration in Thomas' position might be noted here. Rather than calling Scripture the source (*principium*) of theology, Thomas calls the articles of faith the *principia* (sources) of theology. From this point later Romanist theologians would go on to state that not all articles of faith are necessarily drawn from Scripture, although it is doubtful if Thomas would have supported such an inference from what he said. It may finally be said that if there is a confusion in Thomas between the realm of reason and the realm of tradition in theology it is not to be found in the prolegomena but

in the way he carries out his theology; this is said in opposition to the rather severe judgment of Harnack.³⁷

More than any other scholastic theologian Thomas came closer to affirming a principle of *sola Scriptura* in his prolegomenon. But he was never able to carry out anything even approximating such a principle in practice. He consciously affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture as a fundamental assumption for the theological enterprise. For instance, he says, "It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical Scripture."³⁸

Duns Scotus³⁹

Duns in his prolegomena has much to say about revelation and Scripture. After going to great length in showing the necessity of revelation he considers a section on the sufficiency of holy Scripture. Against the heretics who would reject parts or the whole of Scripture he advanced eight arguments for the truth (*veritas*) of Scripture. 1) Prophecy and fulfillment. 2) The agreement of Scripture with itself. It is obvious, he says, that a greater mind than man's created the Scriptures. 3) The authority of the writers of Scripture. Duns points out that the writers of Scripture claim divine authority. Thus to credit their writings with anything less than absolute authority is to charge them with deliberate lies. 4) The diligence which was exercised in receiving the canon. The church, he says, was always careful to receive only those books which were written by prophets, who wrote by divine inspiration (*scriptura recepta sit in Canone quam auctores, non sicut homines sed sicut prophetas, divina inspiratione scripserunt*). 5) The reasonableness of the contents of Scripture. Duns claims that the things we believe from Scripture are not unreasonable, for they comport with divine perfection. 6) *De irrationalitate errorum*. Here Duns lashes out against the insipid, asinine errors of Jews, Manichaeans and other heretics who twist Scriptures against Christ. This is due often to lack of knowledge of Scripture. For "not even one passage of Scripture can be opposed." 7) The stability of the Church which accepts Scripture. One can imagine where this one proof will lead Duns. 8) The clear proof of miracles. After listing these eight arguments Duns proceeds to affirm the sufficiency of Scripture for leading man on the way he ought to go. He seems to follow Origen and approach the later Lutherans, who contended that the sufficiency of Scripture was not of such a nature that everything was in Scripture expressly, but everything (e.g., Trinity, etc.) was there *virtualiter, sicut conclusiones in principiis*.

Concerning theology as a science Duns begins by pointing out that science, strictly speaking, embraces four factors: 1) it is certain knowledge with no possibility of doubt or of being deceived (*cognitio certa*); 2) it is necessary knowledge and not contingent; 3) it is evident to the intellect (*sit causata a causa evidente intellectui*); and 4) it can be demonstrated by

³⁷Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 6.169.

³⁸In *Iob.* 13, lect. 1.

³⁹Duns Scotus. *Opera omnia* (Vatican City: typus polyglotis Vaticanis, 1901-1946).

reasoning and discursive argument. According to the first three factors theology is *in itself* a science, but not for us. In the sense that theology deals with God's external operations it is not a science because it is not necessary (4,1).

Theological science--Duns would prefer the word wisdom--does not depend upon any other science. Although metaphysics deals with God, still theology does not derive any principia from metaphysics. The principles of theology are accepted on faith, on authority. Nor can theology be demonstrated by any *principia entis*. Here he differs from Thomas. And we see the cleavage between the two philosophers, or theologians. Duns is still basically a voluntarist. He will not give the same weight to reason and demonstration as Thomas. Thus more weight is given to faith and authority. Unfortunately, this ultimately becomes the authority of the Church. Thus we find Duns differing also with Thomas in teaching that theology is *scientia practica*, whereas Thomas said it was chiefly a *scientia speculativa*. Of all the scholastic theologians Duns says more about the intrinsic authority and inerrancy of Scripture than any other. And some of his points summarized above are actually taken over by Protestant theologians during the period of orthodoxy. But with all his insistence upon the authority, truthfulness and even sufficiency of Scripture, Duns was far from affirming a *sola Scriptura* principle and even farther from putting anything approximating such a principle into action.

In Thomas and Duns we see how difficult it is to maintain the *sola Scriptura* against the encroachments of reason on the one hand and of Church authority on the other hand.

III.

Our brief survey of the history of the doctrine of biblical inspiration from apostolic times to the Reformation ends with Luther (cf. the next chapter for his successors), although we can only offer a cursory view of his position. He represents the end of one era (the Middle Ages) and the beginning of another (the Reformation). There is no need to examine the position of other lesser Reformers such as Melanchthon, Flacius (who did a tremendous amount of pioneering work in biblical studies) and others; for on no important point do they differ from Luther in his attitude toward the Scriptures and his use of them.⁴⁰

⁴⁰One need only compare the discussions of Melanchthon's doctrine of Scripture by Hans Engeland, *Glauben und Handeln* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1931) and the discussions of Flacius' view of Scripture by Günter Moldaenke, *Schriftverständnis und Schriftdeutung im Zeitalter der Reformation. I. Matthias Flacius Illyricus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936) with E. Thestrup Pedersen's discussion of Luther's doctrine of the Word, his hermeneutics and exegesis [*Luther som Skriftfortolker* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1959)] to learn that there is no essential difference between the position of Luther and the other conservative Reformers on the doctrine of Scripture. Older historians such as Isaac Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, trans. George Robson and Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark,

Although Luther inherited the unanimous high view of Scripture held by the early church and throughout the Middle Ages, he brought with him for a number of reasons a different approach to Scripture from that of his predecessors. Thus his convictions concerning the divine origin of Scripture, biblical authority and inerrancy, convictions held by the Fathers and assumed, although at times submerged, by the scholastics, were informed by a new evangelical hermeneutic and approach to theology. The significance of this fact can scarcely be overemphasized.

What is so different and even revolutionary in Luther's approach to Scripture? Certainly one factor which sets him apart from the scholastic theology from which he had emerged was the humanistic influence of the day with its solid emphasis on philology and on theology as exegesis of Scripture, a scholarly emphasis which prompted Luther to learn the biblical languages, lecture on books of the Bible, and ultimately to translate the Bible into German. But this factor alone does not explain the dynamics of Luther's doctrines of Scripture and the great theological influence of that doctrine.

It has been conjectured that Luther's personal experience issuing from his discovery of the gospel of justification by faith in Scripture is the key to understanding his doctrine of the Word.⁴¹ But such a theory puts the cart before the horse and misunderstands Luther's own view of the subsidiary place of experience in relation to the power and authority of the divine Word.

No, Luther discovered a number of things about the form and content of Scripture which had previously been unappreciated, though taken for granted, and ignored.

First, he learned that theological science or wisdom is a *habitus* or charism not merely given by the Holy Spirit, as all the Medieval theologians had taught, but given by the Spirit *through the Scriptures*. Thus, to be a theologian one must first of all be scriptural, he must read and reread them,⁴²

⁴⁰ 1871) and more significantly Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908-27) and their followers find only superficial differences, of which they sometimes make too much and which have been corrected by the exhaustive studies of Wilhelm Walther and Michael Reu. I base much of the following discussion on their evidence and conclusions.

⁴¹ This view is advanced, for instance, by Rupert Davies, *The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers* (London: The Epworth Press, 1946). He says, "The almost immediate result of his [Luther's] experience of justification by faith was the conviction that the Scriptures provide the whole and authoritative source of truth."

⁴² The following keys to abbreviations are observed:

Er. Lat. Martin Luther, *Opera Latina* (Frankfort and Erlangen: Heyder and Simmer, 1865-73).

WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kirtische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883).

W2 Martin Luther, *Sämtliche Schriften*, herausgegeben von Dr. Joh. George Walch, 2. Auflage (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881-1930).

See W² 18, 732; 18, 332.

grapple with them,⁴³ understand their intended sense without human gloss,⁴⁴ and yield to them.⁴⁵ In short, he must be a *bonus textualis* first and foremost.

The first concern of a theologian should be to be well acquainted with the text of Scripture (a *bonus textualis*, as they call it). He should adhere to this primary principle: In sacred matters there is no arguing or philosophizing; for if one were to operate with the rational and probable arguments in this area, it would be possible for me to twist all the articles of faith just as easily as Arius, the Sacramentarians, and the Anabaptists did. But in theology we must only hear and believe and be convinced at heart that God is truthful, however absurd that which God says in His Word may appear to be to reason.⁴⁶

Luther never tires of stressing the point that the Holy Spirit makes one a theologian only by leading one to an understanding and acceptance of the words of Scripture.

This is our foundation: where the Holy Scripture establishes something that must be believed, there we must not deviate from the words, as they sound, neither from the order as it stands, unless an express article of faith (based on clear Scripture passages) compels us to interpret the words otherwise, or arrange them differently. Else, what would become of the Bible.⁴⁷

Again Luther says:

You should meditate, that is, now in the heart alone, but also externally, work on and ply the oral speech and the lettered words in the Book, read them and reread them again and again, noting carefully and reflecting upon what the Holy Spirit means by these words. And have a care that you do not tire of it or think it enough if you have read, heard, said, it once or twice, and now profoundly understand it all; for in that manner a person will never become much of a theologian.⁴⁸

⁴³W² 6, 96. This implies using the analogy of Scripture, W² 15, 1271; WA 46, 726.

⁴⁴WA 10, 1, 1, 417: "Our faith must above all things be based on clear Scriptures, which are to be understood simply according to the sound and meaning of the words;" cf. W² 3, 21; 22, 577. And the intended sense is only one, W² 18, 1447; 11, 313; 1, 950-952.

⁴⁵W² 13, 1898; WA 24, 19.

⁴⁶W² 5, 456.

⁴⁷WA 18, 147.

⁴⁸W² 14, 435.

It is significant that the old accepted catholic assumptions regarding Scripture's divine origin and authority are assumed throughout these urgent admonitions of Luther's concerning the making of a theologian.

It is Luther's utter adherence to the Scriptures as the source of all theology that led him to his discovery of the gospel of justification in Romans 1:16. This same regard for Scripture and yielding to it led to his insight, followed by Melanchthon and also the Reformed theologians, that Scripture ought to be divided into the themes of Law and Gospel and similar hermeneutical breakthroughs. Certainly it was also this confidence biblicistic dependence upon the Scriptures which brought about his rejection of philosophy and philosophical principles in establishing theology (such as the principle of Aristotle and Aquinas: *finitum non est capax infiniti*). Luther says:

Paul takes them all together, himself, an angel from heaven, teachers upon the earth, and masters of all kinds, and subjects them to the Holy Scripture. Scripture must reign as queen, all must obey and be subject to her, not teachers, judges, or arbiters over her; but they must be simple witnesses, pupils and confessors of it, whether they be pope or Luther or Augustine or an angel from heaven.⁴⁹

As he rehearses what makes a Christian a theologian Luther has already articulated a clear position regarding biblical authority, but in an eminently practical, not a theoretical, context.

Second, like the Church Fathers, Luther sees the Scriptures as Christocentric in their entire sweep and soteriological in their purpose, but again in the practical context of consistent hermeneutical application which informs his entire theological activity. To Luther "Christ is the sum and truth of Scripture."⁵⁰ "The Scriptures from beginning to end do not reveal anyone besides the Messiah, the Son of God, who should come and through His sacrifice carry and take away the sins of the world."⁵¹ "The entire Scripture points only to Christ."⁵² "Outside the book of the Holy Spirit, namely the holy Scriptures, one does not find Christ."⁵³ Such statements concerning the Christocentricity of the Old and New Testaments could be multiplied.⁵⁴ The

⁴⁹WA 40, 1, 120; cf. WA 10, 2, 256; WA 10, 1, 80: "There is no other evidence of Christian proof on earth but the Holy Scriptures." Cf. W² 9, 1238; 19, 19ff.; 9, 650; 16, 2212; 8, 1110.

⁵⁰WA 3, 620.

⁵¹W² 17, 1070.

⁵²WA 2, 73.

⁵³W² 9, 1775.

⁵⁴W² 8, 191; 11, 526; 3, 1958-9; 1964; 8, 111; 9, 855, 1818; 9, 1774; WA 17, 2, 234; 52, 509. See Petersen, *Luther*, 251-270 for a thorough discussion of Luther's exegesis on this point and many more similar citations from Luther.

principle of the Christocentricity of Scripture was not something Luther inherited from the early church and then imposed upon the Scriptures. No, he derived the principle from Scripture itself; he found Christ there inductively through sound and serious exegesis, as is made abundantly clear from his commentaries on Genesis, Isaiah, Psalms, and Deuteronomy. Luther's personal theological Christocentricity, while derived from Scripture, informs his exegesis of Scripture. It is not only possible for him, but incumbent upon him, to read the Old Testament in the light of the New just as he read the New in the light of the Old. Such a practice is in harmony with his belief--and the belief of the entire church catholic in the light of Luke 24:25-27, Romans 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:15, and other passages--in the unity of Scripture and in the hermeneutical principle that Scripture is its own interpreter.⁵⁵ It was just his failure to find Christ and justification by faith in certain books of the Old and New Testaments (all *antilegomena*) which prompted Luther to depreciate the value of these books and question their canonicity.⁵⁶ In fact he at times appears to depreciate the Bible itself in comparison with the pearl of great price which is found therein. For instance, he says:

I beg and faithfully warn every pious Christian not to stumble at the simplicity of language and the stories that will often meet him there. He should not doubt that however simple they may seem, these are the very words, deeds, judgments, and history of the high majesty and wisdom of God; for this is the Scripture which makes fools of all the wise and prudent and is open only to babes and fools, as Christ says, Matthew 11:25. Away with your overweening conceit! Think of Scripture as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest lode, which will never be mined out, so that you may find the divine wisdom which God places before you in such foolish and ordinary form. He does this in order to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, to which the angels directed the shepherds, Luke 2:12. Mean and poor are the swaddling clothes, but precious is the treasure, Christ, lying in them.⁵⁷

⁵⁵See Petersen, *Luther*, pp. 93-106.

⁵⁶His principle seems to be summarized in the following overstatement: "Whatever does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or Paul taught it; again, what preaches Christ would be apostolic, even though Judas, Anas, Pilate and Herod taught it." W² 14, 129. For a definitive discussion of Luther's views on canonicity see Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures*, pp. 38-48. Reu demonstrates beyond question that Luther's views on canonicity affect in no way his doctrine of biblical inspiration and authority.

⁵⁷At times Luther opposes Christ to Scripture. "If our adversaries urge Scripture, we urge Christ against Scripture." Again: "One must not understand Scripture contrary to Christ, but in favor of him; therefore Scripture must be brought into relation to Christ or must not be regarded as Scripture." W² 19, 1441. But here Luther is simply applying his hermeneutical principle

Far from belittling Scripture by this statement, Luther enhances it: that is his very purpose as he speaks in such a way. To him Scripture is of supreme value (and how often does he extol the value of Scripture⁵⁸) not merely because of its form, because it is God's Word and revelation, but because of its content and message which is Christ, the crucified and risen Savior of the world.⁵⁸

But there is another reason why Luther valued the Scriptures so highly, namely their power; power to comfort, to save, to regenerate, to lead the child of God to eternal life. In this sense and for this purpose God mightily speaks to us in the sacred Scriptures.⁵⁹ This is the very purpose of the Holy Spirit even as the Holy Spirit diligently describes the most shameful, adulterous history, the most despised, filthy and damnable things in Scripture: to teach, reprove, admonish, bless, and save us.⁶⁰ Luther never tires of extolling the practical value of Scripture for the life of a believer. It makes us happy, trustful, confident Christians and puts us at peace with God.⁶¹ It is our defense against the temptations of the devil, the world and our flesh.⁶² It instructs us in the true worship and service of God⁶³ and in how to be a good theologian.⁶⁴ It sanctifies, reforms and comforts us.⁶⁵ But, most important of all, we learn about God and His grace in Scripture, and so we gain eternal life.⁶⁶ Herein is the great power of the Scripture. For Scripture not only points us to Christ; it shares Christ with us and bestows Him upon us. It brings us to faith, and through it the Holy Spirit comes to us with all His treasures and blessings.⁶⁷ Scripture

⁵⁷of Christocentricity: Scripture simply cannot teach anything against the vicarious atonement of Christ (cf. WA 24, 549, 18; 42, 368, 35; 42, 377, 20) and the doctrine of justification. This is his intention also as he calls Christ the *dominus et rex scripturae* (WA 40, 1, 419ff.). He means simply that law passages must not be allowed to mitigate against those Christological statements in Scripture which teach justification by faith.

⁵⁸W² 19, 1734: "A saying of Holy Scripture is worth more than all the books in the world." W² 9, 831: "When the devil takes the word which brings eternal life; he has taken away everything." W² 9, 654: "If the Word is falsified and God is denied and blasphemed then there can be no hope for salvation." (cf. W² 9, 111, 655, 885, 1788, 1792, 1802). W² 9, 1819: "God gave us Holy Scripture that we should not only read it, but also search, meditate, and ponder on it. In this way one will find eternal life in it." We note the soteriological purpose of Scripture implied in these and similar statements of Luther's.

⁵⁹W² 9, 1800.

⁶⁰W² 2, 1200ff.; cf. 1, 1344; WA 17, 11, 39.

⁶¹W² 4, 2098.

⁶²W² 6, 439, 3, 18; 2, 1385; 5, 274.

⁶³W² 4, 1424; 13, 573; 13, 2215-6.

⁶⁴W² 14, 435.

⁶⁵W² 23, 2085; 4, 1559.

⁶⁶W² 9, 1819; cf. 1788.

⁶⁷W² 5, 271; 3, 760; 5, 415; WA 11, 33.

does all this; it possesses the intrinsic power to do so because it is God's Word, because the Spirit of God is never separated from it,⁶⁸ and because its message is Christ. "All the works which Christ performed are recorded in the Word, and in the Word and through the Word He will give us everything, and without the Word He will give us nothing."⁶⁹ To be sure, the preached Gospel has all the power of the written word of Scripture; but the preached Word, all theology, is only to be drawn from the one divine foundation of Israel, Scripture.

Luther's deep and personal conviction concerning the power of the Scriptures is the *third* factor in Luther's new approach to Scripture.

And so Luther's doctrine of the divine origin of Scripture, its authority and inerrancy, must be viewed in the light of the aforementioned three aspects of his approach to Scripture: a) the Holy Spirit makes one a theologian through Scripture alone, b) Christ's atonement is the burden and "chief article" of all Scripture,⁷⁰ c) the Scriptures are powerful to work faith and make one wise unto salvation. It is not that Luther's bibliology is based upon these three insights; on the contrary, his understanding on these issues is drawn from Scripture.⁷¹ But the hermeneutical pre-understanding Luther brings with him to the study of Scripture results in a far more practical and evangelical view of biblical authority than had previously been held.

What specifically, then, does Luther teach on three issues here under consideration: the divine origin of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture? Formally his views were identical to those of the early church and of the Middle Ages.

Divine Origin or Inspiration

Although Luther, like his predecessors and immediate followers, rarely speaks of inspiration as such, he says in literally hundreds of cases that Scripture is the Word of God, that God speaks through Scripture, and that God is the author of Scripture.⁷² There is no way in which one can anachronistically

⁶⁸W² 18, 1811; Erl. (German) 4, 307; 8, 288; 18, 215; 51, 377-88.

⁶⁹W² 13, 1556.

⁷⁰See *Smalcald Articles* 1, 11, 1ff.

⁷¹And there is no reason to conclude with Otto Ritschl (*Dogmengeschichte*, 4.167-170) that the Lutheran teaching concerning the power of Scripture was derived from a peculiar doctrine of inspiration. After all, Reformed theologians shared Luther's view of the divine origin of Scripture, but never went as far as he in extolling the power of the Word.

⁷²W² 7, 2090; 9, 1811; 9, 1808: "In Scripture one reads not human, but the most high Word of God. God wants students who diligently regard Scripture and heed its words." 9, 1818: "Because we hold that the Holy Scriptures are God's Word which can save us, therefore we should read and study them so that we find Christ revealed and witnessed to in them." Here one discerns that the power of Scripture is dependent upon its divine origin. 1, 531; 22, 39, 25; 3, 1890: "So, then, the entire Scriptures are assigned to the Holy Ghost." Cf. *passim*. 9, 1821, 1852; 7, 113; 3, 21; 3, 1895; 16, 2182; 14, 21; 3, 785; WA 401, 57; 17, 11, 39.

interpret Luther as advancing some sort of pre-Liberal notion that the Bible merely contains the Word of God or pre-Barthian notion that God in some way, where and when it pleases Him, makes the words of men (in Scripture) His Word.⁷³ Luther simply and ingenuously says, "You are so to deal with the Scriptures that you bear in mind that God Himself is saying this."⁷⁴ We fear and tremble before the very words of Scripture because they are God's words, all of them, for "Whoever despises a single word of God does not regard any as important."⁷⁵ Matthew, Paul and Peter were indeed men, but should anyone believe that their words and doctrine were only the word of men and not of God, he is a hardened and blinded blasphemer who should be avoided.⁷⁶ "It is cursed unbelief and the odious flesh which will not permit us to see and know that God speaks to us in Scripture and that it is God's Word, but tells us that it is the word merely of Isaiah, Paul, or some other mere man, who has not created heaven and earth."⁷⁷ That Scripture is the Word of God means for Luther that it is materially and formally so, word for word, His Word, verbally inspired. "The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, written and (I might say) lettered and formed in letters, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God veiled in the human nature."⁷⁸ The very order of the words found in Scripture are intentionally arranged by the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ Thus, not merely the phrases and expressions in Scripture are divine but the very words and their arrangement.⁸⁰ "The prophets do not set forth statements that they have spun up in their own mind. What they have heard from God Himself . . . they proclaim and set forth."⁸¹ And if the holy evangelists arrange their Gospels differently from each other, this too has been determined by the Holy Spirit.⁸²

Authority

To Luther Scripture derives its divine authority not from its content which is the Gospel and the Law, but from its form. It is authoritative because it is the Word of God.⁸³ That Scripture is authoritative means that it alone is the source and norm of doctrine. "No doctrine in the Church can come from

⁷³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson, G. W. Bromily, et al. (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1936-9), I, I, 123.

⁷⁴W² 3, 21.

⁷⁵WA 26, 449.

⁷⁶Er. (German), 28, 342. Cf. *ibid.* 28, 343.

⁷⁷W² 9, 1800.

⁷⁸W² 9, 1770; WA 3, 347; 262.

⁷⁹W² 19, 1104. Cf. WA 47, 193.

⁸⁰W² 4, 1960 (WA 40, III, 254): "Not only the words [*vocabula*], but also the mode of expression [*phrasis*], which the Holy Ghost and Scripture use, are divine."

⁸¹W² 4, 1492. Cf. W² 3, 785; WA 17, 11, 39.

⁸²WA 8, 508.

⁸³W² 8, 38; 9, 839; 3, 325; 13, 1559; 5, 933; 22, 1661; 9, 1238; 9, 87.

anywhere but the Holy Scripture; it is our only source of doctrine."⁸⁴ And only Scripture is the authority, the source and norm of doctrine. "There is no other evidence of Christian proof on earth but the Holy Scripture."⁸⁵ Luther rejoices and revels in the certainty he has as one bound by the authority of Scripture. "One passage of Scripture has more authority than all the books of the world," he says.⁸⁶ And again he says, commenting on Galatians 1:8:

Paul takes them all together, himself, an angel from heaven, teachers upon the earth, the masters of all kinds, and subjects them to Holy Scripture. Scripture must reign as queen, all must obey and be subject to her, not to teachers, judges, or arbiters over her. No, all these must be simple witnesses, pupils and confessors of Scripture, whether they be pope or Luther or Augustine or an angel from heaven.⁸⁷

It is obvious that neither reason, nor philosophy, nor experience, nor pope, nor church council can be regarded as an authority beside Scripture; but all must conform to Scripture. Nor may any of these be allowed to interpret Scripture so as to mitigate against its plain and clear meaning.⁸⁸ Otherwise, "What would become of the Bible?" Scripture would be relegated to the position of a waxen nose and lose its authority entirely. If Scripture is not the authority alone, it is not the authority at all.⁸⁹ Luther not only affirmed the *sola Scriptura* principle; he practiced it.

Inerrancy

The divine origin, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture all hang together for Luther. Each concept entails the other. In contexts where he defends the authority of Scripture Luther affirms or alludes to its divine origin. As he debates his case for the *sola Scriptura* against Romanists or enthusiasts he maintains that the Holy Spirit caused the biblical writers to write clearly, truthfully, and without equivocation. The notion of an authoritative, *errant* Word of God would for Luther have been utter nonsense. No such idea could have been entertained prior to the rise of subjective idealism and existentialism. And so when Luther or any of the Reformers defended the authority of Scripture, which was his chief concern, he was *eo ipso* affirming also Scripture's divine nature and total veracity. In fact, it is very doubtful if Luther ever distinguished carefully between the three concepts.

⁸⁴W² 9, 87. Cf. W² 3, 503; 9, 86, 915; 1, 1290; 8, 1110; 13, 1911; 20, 213; 19, 1071; 20, 213; 19, 1071; 3, 325; 15, 1295; 22, 1661; 9, 87; 19, 19ff. 1238; 16, 2212; 8, 1110. WA 18, 147; 10, 1, 1, 417.

⁸⁵WA 10, 1, 80.

⁸⁶W² 19, 1734.

⁸⁷WA 40, 1, 120.

⁸⁸WA 23, 119, 11ff.; 147, 23ff.

⁸⁹WA 40, 111, 254; 37, 40. Cf. Reu, p. 61 *passim*.

In his usual blunt and ingenuous way Luther affirms the absolute infallibility and truthfulness of Scripture. For Luther, as for those who went before him, this meant 1) that Scripture does not err or deceive in any way, and 2) that Scripture does not contradict itself.

Thus, we find him saying, relative to the first aspect of inerrancy, "Natural reason produces heresy and error. Faith teaches and adheres to the pure truth. He who adheres to the Scriptures will find that they do not lie or deceive."⁹⁰ "Scripture cannot err,"⁹¹ "The Scriptures have never erred."⁹² If Scripture seems to err, it is our fault for not understanding it properly or yielding to it.

The Holy Spirit has been blamed for not speaking correctly; He speaks like a drunkard or a fool, He so mixes up things, and uses wild, queer words and statements. But it is our fault, who have not understood the language nor known the matter of the prophets. For it cannot be otherwise; the Holy Ghost is wise and makes the prophets also wise. A wise man must be able to speak correctly; that holds true without fail.⁹³

This statement of Luther's indicates also that Scripture is *infallibly* true in all its assertions, irrefragable. We need not test it with reason, experience or any other authority. Its utterances can and ought to be accepted *a priori*.⁹⁴ This means taking our reason captive. For the simple words of Scripture often seem to be in opposition to science, evidence, and experience. "As the Word says, so it must come to pass, although all the world, mind and understanding, and all things are against it."⁹⁵ And, of course, it is because Scripture is the Word of God that it is infallibly true.⁹⁶

The second aspect of inerrancy, namely that Scripture cannot contradict itself, is affirmed by Luther with equal vigor. "Scripture agrees with itself everywhere," is his position.⁹⁷ In fact, "It is certain that Scripture cannot disagree with itself."⁹⁸ Only a foolish, coarse, hardened hypocrite will find contradictions in Holy Writ. "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict

⁹⁰W² 11, 162.

⁹¹W² 14, 1073.

⁹²W² 15, 1481; 9, 356.

⁹³W² 14, 1418.

⁹⁴W² 2, 1893; 19, 1309, 1442; 22, 1852; 3, 478; 13, 241; 9, 1839.

⁹⁵W² 8, 1105. Cf. 13, 241: "We should not be offended by the Word of God, even though it really sounds amazing, incredible and impossible, but we should firmly take our stand on it. If God has spoken it, then it must surely be so."

⁹⁶W² 17, 1339; 20, 775; 13, 2478.

⁹⁷W² 3, 18.

⁹⁸W² 20, 798.

itself; it only appears so to senseless and obstinate hypocrites."⁹⁹ Luther's doctrine of inerrancy at this point agrees with his catholic commitment to the unity of Scripture and becomes a fundamental hermeneutical rule, along with the analogy of Scripture, for interpretation. If Scripture should contradict itself at any point, then all exegesis and theologizing end in chaos.

It was "all or nothing" for Luther as he carried out all his theological work and based all his teaching on the inerrant word of Scripture. To find even one error in Scripture was a blasphemy against God and against all of Scripture. "Whoever belies and blasphemes God in one word, or speaks as if it were a trifling thing, he blasphemes God in everything, and regards all blasphemy of God unimportant."¹⁰⁰ This is Luther's "domino theory" vis à vis the veracity of Scripture. Speaking against the fanatics, who tended often to make light of the external word of Scripture, Luther says:

They do not believe that they [the words of Scripture] are God's words. For if they believed they were God's words they would not call them poor, miserable words but would regard such words and titles as greater than the whole world and would fear and tremble before them as before God Himself. For whoever despises a single word of God does not regard any as important.¹⁰¹

Again Luther writes:

Whoever is so bold that he ventures to accuse God of fraud and deception in a single word and does so willfully again and again after he has been warned and instructed once or twice will likewise certainly venture to accuse God of fraud and deception in all of His words. Therefore it is true, absolutely and without exception, that everything is believed or nothing is believed. The Holy Spirit does not suffer Himself to be separated or divided so that He should teach and cause to be believed one doctrine rightly and another falsely.¹⁰²

⁹⁹W² 9, 356. Cf. WA 40, I, 420.

¹⁰⁰W² 20, 775.

¹⁰¹WA 26, 49.

¹⁰²WA 54, 158. Cf. 56, 249; 32, 59; 50, 269. Michael Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures*, p. 56 *passim* has assembled these and many other passages from Luther to show that his position on this point was well thought out and consistent. To Luther theology and Scripture, according to Reu, were one unbroken golden chain. If one link is broken, the whole chain is broken and pulls apart. See Reu's notes on p. 150 *passim*.

Reu, following Wilhelm Walther, also shows with vast evidence that Luther believed in the inerrancy of Scripture also when it spoke of matters seemingly not directly pertaining to doctrine. The very few derogatory remarks Luther made concerning certain passages (either out of frustration because they seemed to conflict with other biblical statements [cf. WA 28, 269; 32, 642] or because of his propensity for hyperbole) are easily

IV.

What conclusions can we draw from this very cursory review of the view toward the Bible held by the church through the ages? (We have found a remarkable essential agreement between the leading Church Fathers, the scholastics, and the first Reformer in their view toward the Bible, of its divine inspiration, authority, and veracity.) Only heretics ventured to reject the universal faith of the church on these issues. We have found that through the centuries from the apostles to the Reformation the belief that Scripture was really and truly God's Word always entailed belief also in the divine authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Scripture is divinely authoritative and infallible just because it is God's Word. Thus biblical evidence or exegesis specifically supporting biblical authority or inerrancy is rarely explicitly offered, for these divine properties were simply assumed to obtain in the case of a divine Scripture. Throughout all these centuries the authority of Scripture in theological work and in the life of the church was the prime concern. When Scripture speaks, God speaks. Not much speculation was advanced concerning the nature of inspiration, except to reject Platonic, Montanist, and other exaggerated theories. It was always enough simply to affirm Scripture's divine origin and its nature as God's authoritative Word. Again, the inerrancy of Scripture as such was never given a great deal of attention or defended at length. This was unnecessary because it was simply assumed by all that for a cognitive word to be authoritative in any meaningful sense it must be inerrant, inerrant in the sense that it always spoke the truth. A simple correspondence idea of truth lies behind every assertion concerning Scripture's reliability or truthfulness. No other idea could have occurred to the theologians and church leaders of this long era. And so the assertions of Scripture are true in the sense that they correspond to what has happened in history or will happen in

¹⁰² explained by Reu and are more than offset by the hundreds of statements of Luther's showing his utter commitment to the divine authority and inerrancy of Scripture.

Many theologians and scholars have pointed to Luther's several derogatory remarks against the Epistle of James and some of the other antilegomena to argue that he had a very free, if not low, attitude toward at least some of the Scriptures as touching their authority (inerrancy). This argument is entirely fallacious. We must recall that, unlike the Roman Catholics and the Reformed, Luther and later Lutherans never taught that the New Testament canon was closed; therefore the antilegomena must remain antilegomena. These books simply were doubted in the early church, and one cannot deny history. Thus, when Luther found that (in his opinion) the theology of James and other antilegomena of the New Testament was different or inferior to that of Paul or John or other New Testament books, he concluded that James was not part of the canon. It was his very high regard for the Bible formally and in terms of its message that forced him (mistakenly) to exclude James from the canon rather than to leave it in the canon as a book containing theology inferior to the rest of Scripture. One may well fault Luther for acting in such a way, and most Lutherans of his day and after his day have done so; but, the fact that he would take such a radical position against James as to exclude it from the canon shows only Luther's high view of all the canonical Scriptures.

the future or to what simply obtains in the case of God and all that is revealed in Scripture about Him and his dealing with men.

Such an idea of truth also underlay the approach to Scripture of those who employed the allegorical method of interpretation or sought a *sensus plenior* or a fourfold sense in Scripture; otherwise why would they resort to such a program as they attempted to find significance in verses that seemed trivial?

Although we find a remarkable unity concerning the divine nature of Scripture during this long period of history, we discover also that such unity is no safeguard against fanciful and wrong hermeneutics, poor exegesis, false doctrine and controversy. Although we learn from history that a high view of Scripture is essential for good exegesis, it does not guarantee good exegesis. Not until the time of Luther was the sufficiency of Scripture clearly enunciated and practiced consistently, although the divine authority of Scripture was always held. Not until the Reformation was the Christocentricity of Scripture more than a kind of shibboleth; it was rarely at least a working hermeneutical rule (drawn from Scripture) to get at the intended (literal) sense of Scripture. And a high view of Scripture does not necessarily lead to a love of the Scriptures, a desire to search them and live in them.

But if this unity we have traced concerning the nature and authority of the cognitive source of theology does not automatically lead to unity of doctrine in the church, it at least forms a basis of discussion. And during the first fifteen hundred years of church history a common belief concerning the divine source of Christian doctrine was certainly the greatest single factor in making doctrinal discussion possible between all Christians, and also fruitful, and at times successful. For there was always the conviction within Christendom that pure doctrine was based upon the Scriptures, that it was a great blessing to the church, and that unity in the doctrine was possible. Today this is not the case. With the divine origin, authority and the infallibility of Scripture denied or subverted, pure doctrine in the church becomes an impossibility and the very desire for it as the highest honor of God and help for the proclamation of the Gospel is considered naive or even presumptuous.

And so we have learned many things from our brief study of the view of the Bible held by the church through the ages, and perhaps unlearned a few things. But the most important is the lesson that the quality of theology in the church--and the church lives by its theology--although it may descend below the level of the view of Scripture held in the church, will rarely rise above it.

THE VIEW OF THE BIBLE HELD BY THE CHURCH: CALVIN AND THE WESTMINSTER DIVINES

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PAPER SUMMARY

In this paper we try to show that John Calvin and the Calvinists at the Westminster Assembly held to the inerrancy doctrine. It is easy to prove. The difficult matter is to explain why some knowledgeable scholars cannot accept that and argue against inerrancy, in fact. We try to show that the reason for the debate is not because of what Calvin and Westminster wrote, but what some scholars errantly *deduce* from what they wrote. For example, Calvin's being critical about a certain text's inclusion in the Bible at all, is thought to indicate Calvin's being critical of the Bible itself.

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INTRODUCTION

The Reformation was not a revolution. The intent of the Protestant Reformation was not to create new doctrine or establish a new church. Rather the impetus of the movement was to bring into bold relief crucial doctrines obscured by the process of sacerdotalism within the medieval Roman Catholic Church. *Sola Fide* was not new, finding its classical expression in Augustine's *De Spiritu et Littera*, likewise *Sola Scriptura*, in principle, was not invented by Luther.

Inerrancy has been the classic view of Scripture throughout church history. To view it as the brain child of seventeenth century Protestant scholasticism or the *de novo* creation of the "Old Princeton" school is to distort the facts of history. To be sure this assertion has been brought into question again and again in the twentieth century. In the first quarter of this century we saw the rise of "Neo-Orthodoxy" under the leadership of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Paul Althaus, and in the earlier days, Rudolf Bultmann. While this school sought a restoration of some semblance of the Reformed Faith over against the excessives of nineteenth century liberalism it also sought to "correct" Orthodoxy at several points; most notably, to correct the notion of inerrancy in light of modern conclusions drawn from negative higher criticism.

With the advent of Neo-Orthodoxy came the attempt by some of its advocates to show that Neo-Orthodoxy was not deviating from classical views of Scripture but merely "reforming" views that crept in via a reification of the dynamic view of Scripture taught by Calvin and Luther. Protestant scholasticism allegedly ossified the vitality of the sixteenth century. The dynamic Scripture was made "static" through theories of verbal inspiration and inerrancy. The chief culprit in this obscuration of the pure Reformation Century view was supposedly the Old Princeton School as embodied particularly in Benjamin B. Warfield.

Of late, many evangelical scholars have echoed the protest of earlier Barthians maintaining that inerrancy indeed reflects a late development, even departure from the classical view. Some evangelical scholars not only favor partial biblical inerrancy but insist that the historic Christian church believed it. Our attempt in this essay will be to show that the main historic path of Reformed tradition has been that of full inerrancy. It is significant that the current fourth edition of *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*¹ recognizes the classical character of the concept of inerrancy. While this most massive and comprehensive one-volume encyclopedia in the world possesses a great deal

¹*The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, eds. William H. Harris and Judith S. Levey, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975).

of religious information, it is essentially secular in viewpoint and quite objective. Its matter-of-fact statement is therefore all the more impressive:

The traditional Christian view of the Bible is that it was *all* written under the guidance of God and that it is, therefore, *all true*, literally or under the veil of allegory. *In recent times*, however, the view of many Protestants has been influenced by the pronouncements of critics (see Higher Criticism). This has produced a counter-reaction in the form of fundamentalism, whose chief emphasis has been in the inerrancy of the Bible (*italics added*).²

The traditional Christian view is that the Bible is "all true." What "fundamentalism" has reacted to is deviation from the historic norm.

Why then, if secularists, outside the internecine struggles of churchmen, recognize the obvious thrust of Christian history is the matter debated so strenuously within the church? Laymen especially are puzzled and bewildered when their trusted mentors who are regarded as experts differ about this matter of the church's historic position on inerrancy. Why do men who have studied the subject thoroughly come so often to differing and even conflicting conclusions? How can lay people understand the matter if the scholars maintain exactly opposite interpretations of the very same data? Such confusion is quite frustrating to laymen and cause some to despair of ever being able to resolve the conflicts.

This is not so difficult to answer as it may appear at first glance. The trouble is rarely in the sources of information. Two chief factors are frequently at work when data is misinterpreted. One factor involves a weakness of character, namely, prejudice. The other factor involves a weakness of deductive skill. The accumulation of data requires inductive skill. The analysis and interpretation of the data requires deductive skill. At times the two factors may be closely interrelated. Men with normally great powers of deduction may fail if their minds are governed by prejudice.

There is a general tendency in church history for those who deviate from orthodoxy to try to prove their deviation is, in reality, an exercise in reprimand and reformation. To be sure, in some circles, radical novelty is regarded as the touchstone of progress and truth. But in other circles, most especially within the mainstream of Christendom, it is often regarded as the kiss of death. Most heretics in the history of the Church initially sought to defend their views by appeals to segments of Scripture. Only after their exegesis was seen to be faulty did they seek to attack the credibility of Scripture itself. Appeals to the Bible and/or tradition are a commonplace method for those who seek widespread endorsement of ideas or doctrines which in fact are contrary to the teaching of both.

In the case of the current controversy over inerrancy let us not assume that we are dealing with such sinister manipulations of the data which are commonly

²Ibid., p. 291.

characteristic of rank heretics. I prefer to assume that the problem among evangelicals is not so much one of blind prejudice but of weaknesses and pitfalls in the area of deduction.

Some scholars of massive learning are not well skilled in drawing conclusions. Some laymen who know nothing of the subject matter, except what the experts tell them, can easily see that certain conclusions drawn by the experts do not follow from the data presented by the experts themselves. Thus, they may be benefitted by the scholar's learning and not be harmed by his *non sequiturs*.

There are five very common *non sequiturs* (things that do not follow) in the field we are about to survey. If the reader will master them, he will, we believe, avoid a great deal of misunderstanding.³

1. The phenomenal *non sequitur*
2. The accommodation *non sequitur*
3. The emphasis *non sequitur*
4. The critical *non sequitur*
5. The docetist *non sequitur*

The *phenomenal non sequitur*: the Bible's representing things as they *appear* (phenomena) has occasioned the logical leap that it contains error, because that is not the way things *are*. Obviously, this does not follow. If the Bible taught that things *appeared* one way and they did *not appear* that way, that would be an error. But, for the Bible to teach that things appear one way when they actually are another way is not error. A simple illustration is assuming that the Bible is in error when it refers to a "sunrise" (which is how things appear) because that is not the way things are (the sun does not "rise").⁴

The *accommodation non sequitur*: the Bible's representing God as accommodating Himself to human language has occasioned the logical leap that His Word contains error, because accommodation to human language involves accommodation to human error. Obviously, this is also not right. It does not follow that because God accommodates Himself to human language He must accommodate Himself to human error. This would only follow by logical necessity if it were first proven that all human language could only err. This would not even be theoretically possible to prove for it would require human language to prove that human language always errs and the conclusion itself would have to be errant. Accommodation may be coupled with the phenomenal *non sequitur* by

³We will refer to these *Non Sequiturs* throughout the article. The reader may wish to consult the list below. Incidentally, we wish to express our deep gratitude to R. C. Sproul for his critique of this essay without holding him in any way responsible for any of its defects.

⁴A. H. Strong asks, "Would it be preferable, in the O.T. if we should read: 'When the revolution of the earth upon its axis caused the rays of the solar luminary to impinge horizontally upon the retina, Isaac went out to meditate' (Gen. 24:36)?" (*Systematic Theology* [Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1907], 1:223.) The great inerrantist Martin Luther was himself committing this *non sequitur* when he condemned Copernicus's heliocentrism.

asserting that God accommodates us by using phenomenal language. An example is the supposition that the Bible's representing God as "repenting" (which is how it looks to us) is an error because of God's unchangeableness (which is how it is).⁵

The *emphasis non sequitur*: the Bible's emphasizing certain things has occasioned the logical leap that it contains error, because it must be indifferent to other unemphasized things. But it does not follow that because the Bible stresses one thing, it errs in the things it does not stress. For example, it does not follow from the Bible's stress on salvation that it may err with impunity in mere historical details.⁶

The *critical non sequitur*: the fact that the theologians of the church perform the work of textual critics has occasioned the logical leap that therefore they believe the Bible contains error. But it does not follow that because a scholar examines a text to see whether or not it *belongs* to the Bible he therefore believes the *Bible* can err. For example, if Luther at one point denied that James belonged in the Bible it does not mean that Luther believed the Bible itself was errant.⁷

The *docetic non sequitur*: the Bible's representing itself as the Word of God written by men has occasioned the logical leap that it is therefore errant. Obviously this too does not follow. "To err is human" may be descriptive of the fact that men do err and that error is characteristic of men rather than God. But it does not follow that men always err, even apart from inspiration. Certainly it does not follow that if God inspired *men*, he would be incapable of keeping them free of human error in writing. For example, it does not follow from the Bible's saying that God used Paul in the writing of the epistles that God could not keep those epistles free from error.⁸

⁵Arthur Lindsley, "The Principle of Accommodation," an unpublished Pittsburgh Theological Seminary paper (1975), gives a sound current discussion and critique of this *non sequitur*.

⁶George MacDonald carried this *non sequitur* to its logical conclusion when he wrote, "It is Jesus who is the revelation of God, not the Bible." Cited by William A. Glover in *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent, 1954), p. 82.

⁷Emil Brunner illustrates this *non sequitur* when discussing John Calvin in *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), p. 275.

⁸This has been a persistent *non sequitur* in neo-orthodoxy generally, and Karl Barth has specialized in it (cf. *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, second half-volume, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956], pp. 523ff.). Klaas Runia has astutely criticized Barth in *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) in an *ad hominem* manner by observing that Barth himself believed that Jesus Christ was true man, without his humanity preventing his sinlessness. See also R. C. Sproul's critique of this *non sequitur* on Barth in "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis" in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 255-257.

Equipped with this logical geiger counter to detect hidden mines and booby traps, let us tread very carefully, though hastily, through the path of history since the Reformation in an attempt to ascertain the Reformed tradition concerning biblical inspiration and inerrancy.⁹

⁹The history of the doctrine of inspiration has been repeatedly and thoroughly researched. In addition to extensive studies in encyclopedias and histories of doctrine, innumerable monographs have appeared on the subject in general as well as on details such as "alleged discrepancies" (cf. John Haley, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* [Nashville: Goodpasture, 1951]) and individual theologians (cf. A. D. R. Pohlman, *The Word of God According to St. Augustine* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961]). It is sufficient here to note a few of the more important general historical works. Classical nineteenth century studies included: William Lee, *The Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1858); George T. Ladd, *The Doctrine of Sacred Scripture: A Critical, Historical and Dogmatic Inquiry*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1883). More recently there are William Sanday, *Inspiration: Eight Lectures on the Early History and Origin of the Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration* (London: Longmans, 1903); G. D. Barry, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Holy Scripture: A Study of the Literature of the First Five Centuries* (New York: Macmillan, 1919); Daniel J. Theron, *Evidence of Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958); Johannes Beumer, *Die Inspiration der Heiligen Schrift* (Freiberg, Basel, and Vienna: Herder, 1968); Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster; London: Hutchinson, 1972); Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, rev. ed. (New York, London: Macmillan, 1972); Daniel Loretz, *Das Ende der Inspirations Theologie: Chancencines Neubeginns*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1974).

Just before this volume went to the printer a copy of Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) came into my hands. Though not a historical study, it is a most acute analysis of the contemporary debate. While attacking inerrancy and defending a so-called infallibilist position, it is one of the most judicious, balanced, fair critiques I have ever read. Davis avoids virtually all *non sequiturs*, argues to the point, honors motives, recognizes differences, all the while unambiguously affirming orthodox doctrines himself. He admirably embodies the concept of a "worthy opponent." Nevertheless, I believe his argument against inerrancy and for "infallibilism" fails utterly. His attack is unsuccessful because he admits that he cannot prove that "errors" actually do exist in the Bible (cf. chapter 5, p. 141), and this leaves him with only one feeble argument; namely, that the Bible does not explicitly use the word inerrant in its self-description. But if it calls itself God's Word many times, thus indicating the inspiration not only of the writers but of the writings as well, what can a divine Word be but an inerrant Word? The mountain is laboring and not even bringing forth a mouse. Davis' own infallibilist position self-destructs, for he admits that his Bible may even err on any crucial doctrine (though he hopes not and thinks it will not), and he admits that ultimate reliance for truth is on his own mind, Scripture notwithstanding (p. 70). Over two hundred years ago, Jonathan Edwards demolished this very argument found in the Deist, Matthew Tindal's *Christianity As Old As Creation* (Miscellany 1340 in H. G. Townsend, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards* [Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 1955]) so thoroughly that I doubt that, if Davis had read that critique, his *Debate About the Bible* would ever have been written.

JOHN CALVIN

Though the Reformation begins properly with Luther, Dr. Preus' excellent article in this volume permits us to omit him. We will take as our point of departure the work of Calvin. Karl Barth precisely summarized the Reformation view of Calvin on the Bible as follows:

In the Reformation doctrine of inspiration the following points must be decisive.

I. The Reformers took over unquestionably and unreservedly the statement on the inspiration, and indeed the verbal inspiration of the Bible, as it is explicitly and implicitly contained in those Pauline passages which we have taken as our basis, even including the formula that God is the author of the Bible, and occasionally making use of the idea of a dictation through the Biblical writers. How could it be otherwise? Not with less but with greater and more radical seriousness they wanted to proclaim the subjection of the Church to the Bible as the Word of God and its authority as such . . . Luther is not inconsistent when we hear him thundering polemically at the end of his life: "Therefore, we either believe roundly and wholly and utterly, or we believe nothing: the Holy Ghost doth not let Himself be severed or parted, that He should let one part be taught or believed truly and the other part falsely . . . For it is the fashion of all heretics that they begin first with a single article, but they must then all be denied and altogether, like a ring which is of no further value when it has a break or cut, or a bell which when it is cracked in one place will not ring anymore and is quite useless." (*Kurzes Bekenntnis vom heiligen Sakrament* 1544 W.A. 54, 158, 28). Therefore Calvin is not guilty of any disloyalty to the Reformation tendency when he says of Holy Scripture that its authority is recognized only when it . . . is realized that *autorem eius esse deum*. In Calvin's sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16ff. (C. R. 54, 238ff.) God is constantly described as the *authour of Holy Scripture* and in his commentary on the same passage we seem to hear a perfect echo of the voice of the Early Church. . . . In spite of the use of these concepts neither a mantico-mechanical nor a docetic conception of Biblical inspiration is in the actual sphere of Calvin's thinking.¹⁰

Though Barth saw a basic harmony between Luther and Calvin on Scripture, Brunner did not. Brunner did not see the inerrancy doctrine in Luther but saw it correctly at least in Calvin.

¹⁰ Barth, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, part 2, p. 520.

Calvin is already moving away from Luther toward the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. His doctrine of the Bible is entirely the traditional, formally authoritative view. The writings of the Apostles "pro dei oraculis habenda sunt [are oracles which have been received from God]" (Institutio, iv, 8, 9). Therefore, we must accept "quidquid in sacris scripturis traditum est sine exceptione [whatever is delivered in the Scripture without exception]" (I., 18, 4). The belief "auctorem eius (sc: scripturae) esse deum [God is the author of all Scripture]" precedes all doctrine (I., 7, 4). That again is the old view.¹¹

In spite of Barth and Brunner's recognition of Calvin's view of Scripture some have persisted in asserting that inerrancy is a later intrusion into the Reformed tradition. Though the Calvin corpus has been canvassed repeatedly to demonstrate the Reformer's doctrine of Scripture some have still balked at granting that he held to inerrancy. Nothing that modern opponents of inerrancy have presented, cited, deduced, or inferred in any way whatsoever shows that Calvin held any other view than the absolute inerrancy of Holy Scripture. Brunner¹² and Dowey¹³ find verbal inspiration in Calvin. Bromiley even finds dictation.¹⁴ Kenneth Kantzer's doctoral thesis may be the most thorough demonstration of Calvin's teaching of inerrancy,¹⁵ and John Murray¹⁶ and J. I. Packer¹⁷ are with him though they find problems.

If problems exist with Calvin they are basically related to the *non sequiturs* outlined above. To be sure Calvin wrote no major formal treatise on Scripture. That is not at all surprising inasmuch as the doctrine was not an issue in his day. His debate with Rome was not over the inspiration or inerrancy of

¹¹Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), p. 111. He also admits that Calvin, as Luther, thought that scholars could compute on the basis of biblical genealogies (*Revelation and Reason*, p. 278, note 13).

¹²This kind of thinking leads Grant to remark that "by his acceptance of the primacy of faith in exegesis Calvin opened the way for subjectivism even while he tried to exclude it" (*Short History of Interpretation*, p. 134) and even Brunner thought Calvin was too subjective (*Revelation and Reason*, p. 269). Admittedly, Calvin's phraseology at times suggests subjectivity.

¹³Edward Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 100.

¹⁴Bromiley, *Church Doctrine of Inspiration*, p. 210.

¹⁵This makes Kantzer's assertion of Calvin's inerrancy position in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 137, all the more impressive.

¹⁶John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960).

¹⁷James I. Packer, "Calvin's View of Scripture" in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 95-114.

Scripture. Both sides tacitly assumed the position. When Calvin does speak explicitly on Scripture his view is asserted unambiguously. He refers to Scripture as:

"The sure and infallible record"¹⁸
 "The inerring standard"¹⁹
 "The pure Word of God"²⁰
 "The infallible rule of His Holy truth"²¹
 "Free from every stain or defect"²²
 "The inerring certainty"²³
 "The certain and unerring rule"²⁴
 "Unerring light"²⁵
 "Infallible Word of God"²⁶
 "Has nothing belonging to man mixed with it"²⁷
 "Inviolable"²⁸
 "Infallible oracles"²⁹

Though Calvin does not employ the noun "inerrancy" he makes ample use of the adjectival form "inerring." He also uses "infallible." Thus, for Calvin the Bible is an inerring, infallible book. That is what is generally understood to be meant by "inerrancy."

Calvin's classic statement on Scripture is important:

When it pleased God to raise up a more visible form of the Church, he willed to have His Word set down and sealed in writing. . . . He commanded also that the prophecies be committed to writing and be accounted part of His Word. To these at the same time histories were added, also the labour of the prophets, but composed under the Holy Spirit's dictation. I include the psalms with the prophecies. . . . That whole body [*corpus*],

¹⁸Job, p. 744 as cited by Kantzer in *Inspiration and Interpretation*. The following quotes are likewise cited by Kantzer.

¹⁹*Institutes*, I, 149.

²⁰*Institutes*, III, 166; *Minor Prophets*, II, 177.

²¹*Hebrews*, p. xxi.

²²*Minor Prophets*, I, 506.

²³*Psalms*, II, 429.

²⁴*Psalms*, v, ii.

²⁵*Psalms*, iv, 480.

²⁶*Institutes*, II, 58 and III, 309.

²⁷*II Timothy*, p. 249.

²⁸*Minor Prophets*, III, 200, and *John*, I, 420.

²⁹*Catholic Epistles*, p. 131.

therefore, made up of law, prophecies, psalms and histories was the Lord's Word for the ancient people. . . .

Let this be a firm principle; No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the Church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles . . . [the apostles] were to expound the ancient Scripture and to show that what is taught there has been fulfilled in Christ. Yet they were not to do this except from the Lord, that is, with Christ's Spirit going before them and in a sense dictating their words. . . . [They] were sure and genuine penmen [*certi et authentici amanuenses*] of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God: and the sole office of others is to teach what is provided and sealed in the Holy Scriptures.³⁰

Again, in Calvin's comments on II Timothy 3:16 we read:

In order to uphold the authority of Scripture, he [Paul] declares it to be divinely inspired: for if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men should receive it with reverence. . . . Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all lay down as a settled point this--that the law and the prophecies are not teaching [*doctrinam*] delivered by the will of men, but dictated [*dictatum*] by the Holy Ghost. . . . Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have from their hand, but, since they spoke by divine impulse, they confidently and fearlessly testified, as was actually the case, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke [*os Domini loquutum esse*]. . . . We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God, because it has proceeded from Him alone. . . .³¹

When Calvin speaks of the reverence we owe to Scripture we wonder why modern critics of inerrancy do not rise up and accuse the Reformer of biblicolatry. So strong is this theme of reverence before the Holy Word that Calvin exclaims, "The full authority which they [the Scriptures] obtain with the faithful proceeds from no other consideration than that they are persuaded that they proceeded from heaven, as if God had been heard giving utterance to them."³²

³⁰*Institutes*, IV. viii. 8ff.; cf. I. vi, 2 as cited by Packer in *God's Inerrant Word*.

³¹Packer, "Calvin's View," p. 102.

³²*Institutes*, vii, 1.

With such strong explicit statements from Calvin it may seem surprising, indeed astonishing, that anyone would ever challenge that Calvin was an advocate of inerrancy. Yet the challenge has come. We see examples of the challenge in Fullerton, Doumergue, Schieverger,³³ Panier, and De Grost to name but a few.

Why does the challenge come? We could speculate that Calvin, like so many other scholars, underwent a progressive development of thought in which ideas blossomed which were later corrected or discarded. We, for example, can distinguish between "early Barth" and "later Barth" and between "early Berkouwer" and "later Berkouwer." Thus, perhaps, the citations from Calvin indicate a careful process of "selection" from the massive 59 volumes of the *Corpus Reformatorum*.

This speculative procedure fails miserably as every student of Calvin knows. We cannot find explicit statements of Calvin which would indicate such a corrective development. On the contrary his view of Scripture is sprinkled through a wide variety of his works over a vast number of years. He went to his grave committed to a lofty view of Scripture. His death-bed utterance of 1564 has been recorded for us:

As for my doctrine, I have taught faithfully, and God has given me grace to write, which I have done faithfully as I could; and I have not corrupted one single passage of Scripture nor twisted it so far as I know. . . .³⁴

The primary basis of the challenge to Calvin's view of inerrancy comes from an analysis of his exegetical practice. Though it is virtually universally agreed that Calvin held to a *theory* of inerrancy, that theory was thought by some to be belied by his practice as a critical exegete. Here the *non sequiturs* rear up and charge into the picture.

The *phenomenal non sequitur* appears with respect to Calvin's comments regarding the Bible and natural science. He maintains that the biblical writers simply wrote in popular style, and popular style does not need to be and indeed cannot be harmonized with science. Popular style is one thing; technical style is another. Attention is called to an illustration from Calvin in which Moses called the moon one of the two great lights when in fact it is much smaller than Saturn, as was known even in Calvin's day. There is no problem of harmonization, however. As Calvin says, Moses is talking about things as they *appear* to the naked eye; and the astronomer, about things as they *are* in the telescope (*non sequitur* No. 1). If the astronomer said that Saturn *appeared* to be bigger than the moon, he would be in error. If Moses had said that the moon *is* larger than Saturn, he would have been in error. But Moses is not in error; and Calvin is not implying error in Moses, though Rogers suggests

³³As cited by Kantzer in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 142-144.

³⁴CR, 9, 893b.

that Calvin was acknowledging scientific error in Moses and was indifferent to it.³⁵ Here is what Calvin says in the matter:

Moses here addresses himself to our senses . . . by this method (as I have before observed) the dishonesty of those men is sufficiently rebuked, who censure Moses for not speaking with greater exactness . . . Moses wrote in popular style things which, without instruction, all ordinary persons, endued with common sense are able to understand . . . but had he spoken on things generally unknown, the uneducated might have pleaded in excuse that such subjects were beyond their capacity . . . Moses, therefore, rather adapts his discourse to common usage. . . . There is therefore no reason why janglers should deride the unskillfulness of Moses in making the moon a secondary luminary; for he does not call us up into heaven, he only proposes things which lie open before our eyes.³⁶

Closely related to phenomenal matters are questions arising from Calvin's view of divine accommodation in revelation. Here care is needed in interpreting Calvin lest we slip into the pitfall of *non sequitur* No. 2, *accommodation*. At the heart of Calvin's theology was his doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God. This doctrine set the boundaries of divine-human communication. Calvin was zealous to maintain and preserve the *difference* between man and God as well as their points of similarity. When treating the matter of those dimensions of God's being which are incomprehensible, Calvin speaks of accommodation. He says:

God cannot reveal Himself to us in any other way than by a comparison with things which we know . . . in order to know God we must not frame a likeness of Him according to our own fancy, but we must take ourselves to the Word in which His lively image is exhibited to us.³⁷

This accommodation by which God speaks to us in our language, according to our perspective is not an accommodation to human error but to human levels of understanding.

If God, accommodating Himself to the limited capacity of men, speaks in a humble and lowly style, this manner of teaching is despised as too simple; but if He rise to a higher style, with the view of giving greater authority

³⁵Rogers, "Church Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration," pp. 28-29. Cf. Charles W. Shields, *The Trial of Servetus by the Senate of Geneva: A Review of the Official Records and Contemporary Writings* (Philadelphia: MacCalla, 1893), p. 17; C. T. Ohner, *Michael Servetus: His Life and Teachings* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1810), p. 49; C. Manzoni, *Umanesimo ad Eresia: M. Serveto* (Napoli: Guida Editori, 1974), p. 30.

³⁶*Genesis*, as cited by Lindsley, "Principle of Accommodation," p. 33.

³⁷*Isaiah* (40:18).

to His Word, men, to excuse their ignorance, will pretend that it is too obscure. As these two vices are very prevalent in the world, the Holy Spirit so tempers His style as that the sublimity of the truths which he teaches is not hidden even from those of the weakest capacity, provided they are of a submissive and teachable disposition, and bring with them an earnest desire to be instructed.³⁸

Calvin saw no conflict between inerrant inspiration and accommodation. In fact, accommodation only stresses the point that Calvin regarded the Bible to be inspired for the accommodation is *divine* accommodating. His favorite metaphor of accommodating is "stammering" or "lispings." God is said to "prattle" to us in Scripture with a kind of baby-talk in order to stoop to our level of understanding. Thus, while the Scriptures provide simple levels of understanding of the incomprehensible God it does not follow from such simplicity that it is therefore errant. An infant may lisp, stammer, and prattle while at the same time be truthful about that which he is stammering. No man was ever convicted of perjury simply for lispings.

Calvin's textual criticism has also provoked charges of practice inconsistent with theory. Calvin allows for scribal errors by copyists of the original manuscripts. He allows for variations of chronological order in the Synoptics. He allows for round numbers and the proper use of hyperbole. He even acknowledges the use of intemperate language from the writer of the Psalms but quickly points out the truth of the Bible in all of this.³⁹ Calvin rejected the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. Yet in all this Calvin never made the logical leap of some of his interpreters, that the practice of various forms of textual and canonical criticism implies a denial of inspiration or inerrancy. Calvin avoided *non sequitur* No. 4 (*critical*).

POST-REFORMATION SCHOLASTICISM

A. A. Hodge has written somewhere that the seventeenth century with its Scholasticism was the golden age of Protestantism.⁴⁰ What Hodge felt to be a natural development and fruition of the Reformation, many today consider a distortion and rigidifying. They see a difference of kind rather than degree, a degeneration rather than shift of emphasis.⁴¹ The difference amounts,

³⁸*Psalms* (78:3).

³⁹See Kanzler, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 144-146.

⁴⁰To see the thoroughness of Reformed Scholasticism's development of the inerrancy doctrine, cf. Heinrich Hoppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), pp. 12-47. Robert Preus' *Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the 17th-Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1955) does the same for Lutheran Scholasticism. Seventeenth-century Roman Catholic Scholasticism was also active in this area (cf. Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, p. 66, citing Suarez).

⁴¹This is a common evaluation by neo-orthodox theologians such as Barth and Brunner, who see themselves as truer to the Reformation than its immediate successors. But R. M. Grant also unfortunately remarks that "the later

however, simply to the Scholastics being more academic, pedantic, and methodical. In a word, the Scholastics were more scholastic.

Therefore, to say of the Lutheran Scholastic, John Gerhard, that his "doctrine of Scripture . . . was not an article of faith, but the *principium* (foundation) of other articles of faith" and that he therein differed from his mentor, Luther,⁴² is unjustified. We have shown that Luther had some reason for faith in the Bible as God's Word, as also did Calvin. Once the Bible was recognized as the Word of God, it, of course, became the *principium* for all truth that it revealed. What else? Even those who hold to partial inspiration believe that the inspired part (if they could identify it) is the Word of God and is to be believed.

Rogers says of the great Reformed Scholastic, Francis Turretin: "Because reasonable proofs must precede faith, Turretin felt it necessary to harmonize every apparent inconsistency in the biblical text. He refused to admit that the sacred writers could slip in memory or err in the smallest matters."⁴³ Rogers seems to think that Turretin first harmonized every "apparent inconsistency" before he could have faith in the Bible as the Word of God. But he cites no evidence of this, and we are certain that he can find none. Why, then, does he think this? Apparently because Turretin really did refuse to admit any biblical errors "in the smallest matters." If this is the line of reasoning, it is an example of further *non sequiturs*:

1. Turretin admitted no errors in the Bible.
2. Inconsistencies would involve error.
3. Therefore, Turretin:
 - a. would admit no inconsistency in the Bible,
 - b. would harmonize all apparent inconsistencies, and
 - c. would not believe the Bible was the Word of God until he had completed the harmonizations.

It is 3b and 3c that are the *non sequiturs* Rogers apparently does not notice. It does not follow (and it did not follow for Turretin) that because a person believes there are no errors or inconsistencies in the Bible he can harmonize all apparent ones. It is enough that he can show that apparent inconsistencies are not incapable of harmonization. Obviously, if a person does not have to harmonize every apparent inconsistency even *after* believing the Bible to be the Word of God, he does not have to do so *before* believing it.

⁴¹Reformation did not follow Luther, however, and it came to insist on traditional principles of Verbal Inspiration and Infallibility which has been alien to him" (*Short History*, p. 135). As we have seen, Luther also contended that the words of canonical Scripture were the inerrant words of God, as his successors confirmed. Bromiley, revealing his fideism, takes a middle path, recognizing that the Scholastics represented only a shift of emphasis but feeling that with them "non-biblical rationalism threatens" ("Church Doctrine of Inspiration," p. 213).

⁴²Rogers, "Church Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration," p. 30.

⁴³*Ibid.*

The jibe of Dill Allison that although Turretin "claimed to be expounding Reformed theology, he never quoted Calvin"⁴⁴ is mind-boggling to anyone who knows Turretin's constant allusion to and saturation with John Calvin, whom he admired almost to the point of idolatry.

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Westminster Confession of Faith is Presbyterianism's most influential creed. Chapter I, "Of the Holy Scripture," is its most influential and noble chapter. Inerrancy is its indubitable teaching, although the word itself is not used but only equivalents.⁴⁵

The most extensive and scholarly study ever made of this Confession is undoubtedly Jack Rogers' massive, erudite, able, and influential study, *Scripture and the Westminster Confession*.⁴⁶ Only his persistent misunderstanding of the faith/reason and total/partial inspiration themes vitiates its value. Because of that volume's significance, Rogers' comments on Westminster in *Biblical Authority* are especially important.

Rogers begins with the fideistic interpretation of the Confession characteristic of his major work:

Philosophically, the Westminster divines remained in the Augustinian tradition of faith leading to understanding. Samuel Rutherford stated the position: "The believer is

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 31. When I read the Allison statement I leafed through a few pages of the middle of an English translation of Turretin's systematic theology I used with students and found at casual glancing a half dozen citations of Calvin, more than half of which were quotations. Furthermore, the statement that the *Helvetic Consensus* of Heidegger and Turretin "announced that textual criticism of the Old Testament would 'bring the foundation of our faith and its inviolable authority into perilous hazard'" (ibid.) is distressing. Any reader unfamiliar with the *Consensus* would suppose from this statement that it was opposed to biblical criticism as such. If anyone will read the two relevant paragraphs in *Creeds of the Churches*, ed. John Leith (New York: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 310-311, he will see that the concern of the *Consensus* was with mere conjectural emendation by the critics "sometimes from their own reason alone" of the "Hebrew original." One does not have to agree with the critical opinion of the *Consensus* to recognize its genuine concern lest the word of man be substituted for the Word of God. I believe in textual criticism myself, but I know textual critics who amend the text at the drop of their critical hat, including sometimes the text of the New Testament, which has no vowel-point problem. I oppose such subjective textual criticism and am therefore (like the *Consensus*) sometimes thought, unfairly, to be opposed to valid textual criticism.

⁴⁵ Cf. also chap. XIV: "By this faith a Christian believeth to be true *whatsoever* is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaketh therein."

⁴⁶ Jack B. Rogers, *Scripture and the Westminster Confession* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967).

the most reasonable man in the world, he who doth all by faith, doth all by the light of sound reason."⁴⁷

Here Rogers cites one of the Westminster divines least disposed to his own thesis, quoting a statement from Rutherford that refutes rather than supports it. If the reader ponders the above quotation, he can see that it boomerangs against the one who cited it. It is meant to show that the Scots' divine, Rutherford, operated on the faith-before-reason principle, but it reveals the opposite. Rutherford calls the believer "reasonable." In other words, there are reasons for faith, for to act by faith is to act reasoning "he who doth all by faith, doth all by the light of sound reason." Gillespie, another of the "eleven" primary drafters of the Westminster Confession, could not have said it better. This is a utilization and not a crucifixion of reason. There are reasons for faith. That is no crucifixion of the intellect that extols reasonable faith. Rogers continues:

The "works of creation and providence" reinforce in persons that knowledge which has been suppressed and because of which a person is inexcusable for his sin. Thus there is no "natural theology" in the Thomistic fashion, asserting that persons can know God by reason based on sense experience prior to God's revelation.⁴⁸

Here the point of "reinforce" is missed, just as "confirmation" was in the Calvin discussion. How can creation and providence "reinforce" the innate knowledge of God unless they too reveal God? And what is this but "natural theology," whether exactly the same as Aquinas' or not?

Leaving natural theology and turning to biblical revelation, we read: "The authority of Scripture in section iv was not made dependent on the testimony of any person or church, but on God, the author of Scripture."⁴⁹ True, but what Protestant or Roman Catholic Scholastic ever said that the authority of Scripture was "dependent on the testimony of any person or church?" Everyone recognizes that the authority of the Bible rests only on its being God's Word. The testimony of the church or any other proofs are cited only to try to prove that the Bible is the Word of God. If it is the Word of God, its authority is intrinsic. The debate is finished. No "Aristotelian Scholasticism" would try to demonstrate by external evidence the "Bible's authority." All it would try to demonstrate is the Bible's inspiration; and if it succeeded in that, the authority of the Bible would be established *ipso facto*.

Of course, Reynolds, whom Rogers cites, would say--be he Platonist, Aristotelian, Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Jew--that faith is assent "grounded upon the authority of authenticity of a Narrator . . ." if that Narrator is believed to be God. Men recognize that in their natural state. The point is only that they do not "see" it spiritually. Reynolds explained this very well in his

⁴⁷Rogers, "Church Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration," p. 33.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

essay on "The Sinfulness of Sin:" "A man, in divine truths, [may] be spiritually ignorant, even where in some respect he may be said to know. For the Scriptures pronounce men ignorant of those things which they see and know."⁵⁰ Reynolds is here arguing with the Socinians who deny "spiritual" knowledge altogether in biblical matters. He would now have to argue with Rogers, who denies "natural" knowledge altogether in the same matters. We continue:

Section v climaxed the development of the first half of the chapter with the statement that, while many arguments for the truth and authority of Holy Scripture can be adduced, only the witness of the Holy Spirit in a person's heart can persuade that person that Scripture is the Word of God.⁵¹

This is the statement by which Rogers refutes Rogers on his most fundamental thesis, namely, that faith precedes reason in the historic doctrine of the church and that of Westminster. True to Westminster, he writes, "While many arguments for the truth and authority of Holy Scripture can be adduced, only the witness of the Holy Spirit in a person's heart can persuade." That is, there are arguments of reason that precede faith, though they do not "persuade." This is the view of Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Turretin, Edwards, and Princeton, but it is not Rogers' faith-before-rationality. The rational is *first*; then, *if the Spirit wills*, comes saving knowledge.

Rogers notes that the last five sections of the Confession delineate the "saving content of Scripture," "the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life." Then follows this *non sequitur* (No. 3): "Scripture was not an encyclopedia of answers to every sort of question for the divines."⁵² The *non sequitur* (because the Bible is concerned primarily with salvation it is not concerned with other details) is meant to avoid the inevitable inerrancy doctrine. The "saving *content*" is supposed to be one thing, the saving *context* another thing. But they are inseparably woven together in Scripture! No Westminster divine questioned this, and Jack Rogers does not logically deny it. So it does not follow from the fact that the Bible reveals the counsel of God for our faith and life that it does not include answers to incidental questions.

Rogers returns to Rutherford, saying that according to Rutherford, Scripture was not to "communicate information on science. He listed areas in which Scripture is *not* our rule, e.g., 'not in things of Art and Science, as to speak Latin, to demonstrate conclusions of Astronomy.'⁵³ It is true that

⁵⁰B. Riveley, ed., *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds*, 6 vols. (London: Holdsworth, 1826), 1:103.

⁵¹Rogers, "Church Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration," pp. 33-34.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 34. Note the caricature of the inerrantists' view by making it represent the Bible as an "encyclopedia of answers to every sort of question." Caricature usually reveals the threadbare character of one's own case in that it requires a distorted view of the opposition to survive.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 34.

for Rutherford (as for all other Inerrantists) the Bible is not a textbook of Latin grammar or astronomy, but Rutherford never granted any error of the Bible in science or said that any textbook on science could correctly maintain that Scripture ever erred. Rogers continues with a statement from Rutherford that illustrates *our* point excellently:

Samuel Rutherford, in a tract against the Roman Catholics, asked: "How do we know that Scripture is the Word of God?" If ever there was a place where one might expect a divine to use the Roman Catholic's own style of rational arguments as later Scholastic Protestants did, it was here. Rutherford instead appealed to the Spirit of Christ speaking in Scripture: "Sheep are docile creatures, Ioh 10.27. *My sheep heare my voyce, I know them and they follow me . . .* so the instinct of Grace knoweth the voyce of the Beloved amongst many voyces, Cant. 2.8, and this discerning power is in the Subject."⁵⁴

When the question is raised, "How do we know that Scripture is the Word of God?" the word *know* is clearly used in the sense of "savingly know." This is evident from Rutherford's answer, which shows that the believer knows Christ's voice savingly by an "instinct of Grace." No *mere* rational knowledge is meant, and therefore no mere rational arguments that Rutherford shared with the Roman Catholics are given. He is not speaking of a knowledge that is "abundantly evidenced" by the many arguments but of a persuasion that comes only from the Holy Spirit. If ever there was a place where one might expect a divine to use the Roman Catholic's style of mere rational arguments, it was *not* here.

In conclusion, we read:

For the Westminster divines the final judge in controversies of religions was not just the bare word of Scripture, interpreted by human logic, but the Spirit of Christ leading us in Scripture to its central saving witness to him.⁵⁵

For the Westminster divines the final judge in controversies was the bare Word of God interpreted by human logic, but the Holy Spirit surely assisted the devout interpreter and spoke in the Word he had inspired. Nevertheless, the divines never appealed to something the Spirit was supposedly saying apart from the sound exegesis of his Word. They never attacked an exegesis as not coming from the Spirit but as not coming from the text. As Rogers has noted, these men were not mystics. They did not appeal to any mystical Word but only to the written Word. And they applied their exegesis to *all* questions of religion, such as church government, and not merely to "its central saving witness" to Christ.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

In a word, Westminster is saying, What God has joined together--Word and Spirit--let no man put asunder. It is the Spirit who enables the saint savingly to understand the Word, and it is the Word that enables him to understand that it is the Spirit who is enabling him.

AMERICAN THEOLOGY

Before coming to the inerrancy position of old Princeton, we may note that Princeton had no monopoly on this view. Inerrancy was essentially the American position before as well as after old Princeton. We will take but one example prior to the Princeton development--that of America's most distinguished theologian, Jonathan Edwards (d. 1758).

Jonathan Edwards

Surprise is sometimes expressed that the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter I, "Of the Holy Scripture," does not mention directly the argument for inspiration from miracles. We say "directly" because the phrase "incomparable excellencies that do abundantly evidence the Bible to be the Word of God" amounts to an argument from miracles, for how do these things show the Bible to be the Word of *God* except that they affirm God as the miraculous author behind the men he inspired? Nevertheless, miracles are not mentioned explicitly, and that does surprise some.⁵⁶ It is interesting, therefore, to find that Edwards, who does expressly make much of the argument from miraculous attestation,⁵⁷ subordinates it nonetheless to the "internal" evidence.

In his unpublished sermon on Exodus 9:12-16,⁵⁸ Edwards preached that "God gives men good evidence of the truth of his word." This evidence is internal ("evident stamp") especially, but external also. In fact, "there is as much in the gospel to show that it is no work of men, as there is in the sun in the firmament."⁵⁹

This internal evidence appears to include many matters. Edwards approaches the Bible in the context of human need, arguing as follows: First, it is evident that all men have offended God; second, they are sure from providence that God is friendly and placable; third, God is not willing to be reconciled without being willing to reveal terms; fourth, if willing, he must have revealed terms; and, fifth, if the Bible does not have this revelation, the revelation does not exist.⁶⁰ After all, there are only three groups of

⁵⁶Cf. E. D. Morris, *Theology of the Westminster Symbols* (Columbus Champlin 1900).

⁵⁷Dozens of his *Miscellanies* refer to this subject directly and indirectly.

⁵⁸Cited with the kind permission of the Beinecke Library and Rare Book Room, Yale University.

⁵⁹Sermon on Ephesians 3:10 in *The Works of President Edwards* (New York: Carvill, 1830), pp. 7:66ff.

⁶⁰*Unpublished sermon outline on 2 Timothy 3:16, points 6 and 7.*

mankind: 1) those who receive the Bible, 2) the Muslims (who derive from it); and 3) the heathen, whose gods are idols and who are judged by the light of nature and philosophy.⁶¹ What insights the heathen do have come from tradition.⁶²

Perhaps nowhere has Edwards stated his view of the internal perfections of Scripture better than in the early *Miscellany* 338:

The Scriptures are evidence of their own divine authority as a human being is evident by the motions, behaviour and speech of a body of a human form and contexture, or that the body is animated by a rational mind. For we know no otherwise than by the consistency, harmony and concurrence of the train of actions and sounds, and their agreement to all that we can suppose to be a rational mind. . . . So there is that wondrous universal harmony and consent and concurrence in the aim and drift, such as universal appearance of a wonderful, florid design, such stamps everywhere of exalted and divine wisdom, majesty, and holiness in matter, manner, contexture and aim, that the evidence is the same that the Scriptures are the word and work of a divine mind; to one that is thoroughly acquainted with them, as 'tis that the words and actions of an understanding man are from a rational mind, to one that is of a long time been his familiar acquaintance.

An infant, he continues, does not understand that this "rational mind" is behind a man because it does not understand the symptoms. "So 'tis with men that are so little acquainted with the Scriptures, as infants with the actions of human bodies. [They] cannot see any evidence of a divine mind as the origin of it, because they have not comprehension enough to apprehend the harmony, wisdom, etc."⁶³ Putting the whole matter succinctly, Edwards says that the Bible "shines bright with the amiable simplicity of truth."

As for his argument from miracles as attestation of the biblical revelation, we will confine ourselves to just one miracle: the Jews. "The Jewish nation have, from their very beginning been a remarkable standing evidence of the truth of revealed religion."⁶⁴ An earlier *Miscellany* had shown proof that the Jewish religion was divine because of Jewish pride, which could never have accounted for their exalted religion but would rather have worked against it.⁶⁵

That Jonathan Edwards believed in and taught the verbal inerrancy of the Bible we shall attempt to show by some miscellaneous citations from various works, though it is fully evident in almost everything that he ever wrote or spoke.

⁶¹ *Unpublished sermon on Luke 1:77-79.*

⁶² *Jonathan Edwards, Miscellany* 1337. Cf. 1338.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Edwards, Miscellany* 1290-91.

⁶⁵ *Edwards, Miscellany* 811

First, *Notes on the Bible* (hereafter cited as *NB*) 215:⁶⁶ The "seeming difference" in the account of the numbers of Israel when David numbered his people (2 Sam. 24:9) and the Chronicles account needs to be explained. Edwards will not admit that inspiration does not extend to such external, non-religious data. He first refers to a standard contemporary author, Bedford, and then offers his own conjectures. These do not concern us here where we are interested only in showing what his view was and not how he defended it.

Second, *NB* 220:⁶⁷ deals with "the accounts of the four evangelists, concerning the resurrection of Christ, reconciled." Edwards then proceeds to deal with this thorny historical problem harmonistically at the time when Herman Reimarus is using the problem to attack the traditional position as destructive modern criticism begins in earnest.

Third, *NB* 222:⁶⁸ Here Edwards takes several pages to explain why 2 Chronicles 22:1, 2 seems to make Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, two years older than his father.

Fourth, *NB* 233:⁶⁹ The "seeming inconsistency" in the blind Bartimaeus episode is "thus to be solved . . ."

Fifth, *NB* 328:⁷⁰ This note we shall quote in full for two reasons. First, it gives a characteristic example of some texts as going beyond the understanding of the human writer. Second, at least three times Edwards explicitly refers the text to the Holy Spirit's inspiration, at the same time that the human authorship of the "Psalmist" is treated with absolute seriousness:

Psalm xix. 4,5,6. It appears to me very likely that the Holy Ghost in these expressions, which he most immediately uses about the rising of the sun, has an eye to the rising of the Sun of righteousness from the grave, and that the expressions that the Holy Ghost here uses are conformed to such a view. The times of the Old Testament are times of night in comparison of the gospel day, and are so represented in Scripture, and therefore the approach of the day of the New Testament dispensation in the birth of Christ, is called the day-spring from on high visiting the earth. Luke i. 78. "Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us;" and the commencing of the gospel dispensation as it was introduced by Christ, is called the Sun of righteousness rising. Mal. iv. 2. But this gospel-dispensation commences

⁶⁶ *Works of Jonathan Edwards, A.M.*, Revised and corrected by Edward Hickman, 2 vols. (London: William Ball, MDCCCXXXVII) v. II, p. 739.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 786.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 742.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 789.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 747.

with the resurrection of Christ. Therein the Sun of righteousness rises from under the earth, as the sun appears to do in the morning, and comes forth as a bridegroom. He rose as the joyful, glorious bridegroom of his church; for Christ, especially as risen again, is the proper bridegroom, or husband of his church, as the apostle teaches. Rom. vii. 7. "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit to God."

He that was covered with contempt, and overwhelmed in a deluge of sorrow, hath purchased and won his spouse; (for he loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might present it to himself;) now he comes forth as a bridegroom to bring home his purchased spouse to him in spiritual marriage, as he soon after did in the conversion of such multitudes, making his people willing in the day of his power and hath also done many times since, and will do in a yet more glorious degree. And as the sun when it rises comes forth like a bridegroom gloriously adorned, so Christ in his resurrection entered on his state of glory. After his state of sufferings, he rose to shine forth in ineffable glory as the King of heaven and earth, that he might be a glorious bridegroom in whom his church might be unspeakably happy.

Here the psalmist says that God has placed a tabernacle for the sun in the heavens; so God the Father had prepared an abode in heaven for Jesus Christ; he had set a throne for him there, to which he ascended after he rose. The sun after it is risen ascends up to the midst of heaven, and then at that end of its race descends again to the earth; so Christ when he rose from the grave ascended up to the height of heaven, and far above all heavens, but at the end of the gospel-day will descend again to the earth.

It is here said that the risen sun rejoiceth as a strong man to run his race. So Christ, when he rose, rose as a man of war, as the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle; he rose to conquer his enemies, and to show forth his glorious power in subduing all things to himself, during that race which he had to run, which is from his resurrection to the end of the world, when he will return to the earth again.

Here the going forth of the sun is from the end of heaven and his circuit to the end of it and that nothing is hid from the heat thereof; so Christ rose from the grave to send forth his light and truth to the utmost ends of the

earth, that had hitherto been confined to one nation, and to rule over all nations in the kingdom of his grace. Thus his line goes out through all the earth, and his words to the end of the world, so that there is no speech or language where his voice is not heard, as is here said of the line and voice of the sun and heavenly bodies in the two foregoing verses, which are by the apostle interpreted of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Rom. x. 16, 17, 18. "But they have not all obeyed the gospel; for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."

That the Holy Ghost here has a mystical meaning, and has respect to the light of the Sun of righteousness, and not merely the light of the natural sun, is confirmed by the verses that follow, in which the psalmist himself seems to apply them to the word of God, which is the light of that sun, even of Jesus Christ, who himself revealed the word of God: see the very next words, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

Sixth, *NB* 434:⁷¹ Edwards here sees the "penman of the Psalms" as writing "by the inspiration of the Spirit of God as much as the prophets when they wrote their prophecies, the following things do confirm . . ." Five arguments in support of this observation are offered.

Seventh, *Miscellany* (hereafter designated as M) 229:⁷² "God had a design and meaning which the penman never thought of, which he makes appear these ways: by his own interpretation, and by his directing the penman to such a phrase and manner of speaking, that has a much more exact agreement and consonancy with the thing remotely pointed to, than with the thing meant by the penman." Thus the words of Scripture are not only the words of the Holy Spirit but their transcendent meaning is not even understood by the human writing in some instances.

Eighth, M352: "Moses, then was so intimately conversant with God and so continually under the divine conduct, it can't be thought that when he wrote the history of the creation and fall of man, and the history of the church from the creation, that he should not be under the divine direction in such an affair. Doubtless he wrote by God's direction, as we are informed that he wrote the law and the history of the Israelitish church." We remember that Moses wrote many tedious genealogical and historical details as well as grand passages concerning God and redemption.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 745.

⁷² Many of Edwards' *Miscellanies* have been published but my citations are from the manuscripts which are used with the kind permission of Beinecke Rare Book Room, Yale University.

Ninth, M358: "God took this care with respect to the books of the Old Testament, that no books should be received by the Jewish church and delivered down in the canon of the Old Testament, but what was his word and owned by Christ. We may therefore conclude that he would still take the same care of his church with respect to the New Testament."

Tenth, M426: After discussing principles of interpretation Edwards comes to this conclusion about the Bible as the Word of God: "God may reveal things in Scripture, which way he pleases, if by what he there reveals the thing is any way clearly discovered to the understanding or eye of the mind, 'tis our duty to receive it as his revelation." This is Edwards' equivalent of the classic expression that "what the Bible says God says."

Eleventh, M1144: "That the prophets after they had once had intercourse with God by immediate revelation from God gain'd acquaintance with (him) so as afterward to know him, as it were to know his voice or know what was indeed a revelation from God is confirmed by 1. Sam. 3. 7." In this text referred to God is represented as speaking in human words to Samuel. For Edwards the revelation came in words. The prophets' "Thus saith the Lord" therefore is to be construed literally.

Twelfth, unpublished sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:11-13: Here in referring to the Scripture Edwards uses the term "dictated" but that he does not conceive of the Bible writers as passive is very clear in all his writings as in this discussion of the penning of *The Song of Songs*:

I imagine that Solomon when he wrote this song being a very philosophical, musing man, and a pious man, and of a very loving temper, set himself in his own musings to imagine and to point forth to himself a pure, virtuous, pious and entire love; and represented the musings and feelings of his mind, that in a philosophical and religious frame was carried away in a sort of transport: and in that his musings and the train of his imaginations were guided and led on by the Spirit of God. Solomon, in his wisdom and great experience, had learned the vanity of all other love than of such a sort of one. God's Spirit made use of his loving inclination, joined with his musing philosophical disposition, and so directed and conducted it in this train of imagination, as to represent the love that there is between Christ and his spouse. God saw it very needful and exceeding useful, that there should be some such representation of it. The relation that there is between Christ and the church, we know, is very often compared to that that there is between a man and his wife; yea this similitude is abundantly insisted on almost everywhere in the Scripture; and a virtuous and pious and pure love between a man and his spouse, is very much of an image of the love between Christ and the church. So that it is not at all strange that the Spirit of God, which is love, should direct a holy amorous disposition after

such a manner, as to make such a representation; and
'tis very agreeable to other the like representations.
(M303)

Although for Edwards all of Scripture is given by divine inspiration, God accomplishes this in at least two different ways, by "immediate inspiration" and by divine "direction:" ". . . we ought to distinguish between those things which were written in the sacred books by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and those which were only committed to writing by the direction of the Holy Spirit. . . ." ⁷³

Finally, and in a word, for Jonathan Edwards "All Scripture says to us is certainly true. There you hear Christ speaking." ⁷⁴ That is the very definition of inerrancy.

Liberals find this baffling in Edwards but indisputably his opinion:

George Gordon has written, "It is not edifying to see Edwards, in the full movement of speculation, suddenly pause, begin a new section of his essay, and lug into his argument proof texts from every corner of the Bible to cover the incompleteness of his rational procedure." Peter Gay has very recently written that Edwards was in a biblical "cage." . . . Perry Miller, more than any other student of the Enlightenment, has admired the intellectuality of Jonathan Edwards. Miller senses that in many ways Edwards was not only abreast of our times but ahead of them; nevertheless, he felt Edwards was reactionary in some respects even to his own age. ⁷⁵

Still more recently John E. Smith, the General Editor of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* being published by Yale University Press, has written:

The central problem is this: Edwards, on the one hand, accepted totally the tradition established by the Reformers with respect to the absolute primacy and authority of the Bible, and he could approach the biblical writings with that conviction of their inerrancy and literal truth which one usually associates with Protestant fundamentalism. ⁷⁶

⁷³ *Works*, II, p. 498.

⁷⁴ Outline sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16 in *Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1865).

⁷⁵ John H. Gerstner, "An Outline of the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (July-September 1976): 195.

⁷⁶ *Review of Metaphysics* 30 (December 1976): 306.

Princeton Theology

After an interesting survey of the development of Princeton theology from Archibald Alexander to B. B. Warfield in which Rogers sees it interpreting Westminster in terms of Turretin, incorporating the Aristotelian Common Sense philosophy, and increasingly rigidifying its own position to the point of the inerrancy of the autographs (all of this highly debatable--and worthy of debate if we had space), Rogers observes, "Since the original texts were not available, Warfield seemed to have an unassailable apologetic stance."⁷⁷

First of all, since no evangelical scholar ever defended an infallible translation, where can the written Word of God be located but in the original texts or autographs? This was always assumed. Warfield was no innovator. It is true that some believed the text was transmitted "pure," but in that case we would *have* the autographa. There is no question in any case but that the autographs alone were the written Word of God. Warfield would be amused to be given credit for discovering the obvious.

Second, Warfield believed that we virtually did have the autographa in the form of a highly reliable text.⁷⁸ He did not consider himself, therefore, "unassailable." One modern teacher refers to the appeal to autographa as "weasel words," an accusation that surely is as unfair as it is scurrilous. Did the Westminster divines suppose that the Word of God located anywhere other than in the autographa? Where is the "rigidifying?"

But to continue:

Influenced by this principle [the reliability of sense perception], Hodge showed no trace of the theory of accommodation held by Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Calvin, to explain that we do not know God as he is but only his saving mercy adapted to our understanding. For Hodge: "We are certain, therefore, that our ideas of God, founded on the testimony of his Word, correspond to what He really is, and constitute true knowledge."⁷⁹

We have already shown that Rogers' interpretation of accommodation in the above-named fathers is misleading and erroneous (*non sequitur* No. 2). Hodge is not really differing from the fathers. After enumerating a dozen Bible verses teaching the immutability of God, Hodge remarks about the phenomenological character of God's repentance: "Those passages of Scripture in which God is said to repent, are to be interpreted on the same principle as those in which He is said to ride upon the wings of the wind, or walk through

⁷⁷Rogers, "Church Doctrine and Biblical Inspiration," p. 39.

⁷⁸Cf. John H. Gerstner, "Warfield's Case for Biblical Inerrancy," in *God's Inerrant Word*, pp. 136-137.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 40.

the earth."⁸⁰ God is accommodating himself by using phenomenological language. Hodge also taught the incomprehensibility of God as clearly as Calvin or any other father of the church.⁸¹

A CONTINUING REFORMED TRADITION

Mention is made of James Orr, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and G. C. Berkouwer as respected evangelicals who either did not postulate inerrancy or made a fideistic approach to the Bible in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will not challenge this. Many other names could be added, and other centuries as well, but the names of Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, the Westminster divines, Edwards, and the Princetonians, along with the general tradition of the church from the beginning, must be enrolled under the banner of inerrancy.

Inerrancy has almost always been maintained along with biblical criticism. Criticism was never rejected by Hodge, Warfield, Lindsell, or any other scholarly inerrancy advocate of whom we have ever heard. These men and others have tried and found wanting many of the claims of many of the biblical critics, but that they rejected "biblical criticism" as such is unsupported by evidence. Warfield was noted as a New Testament critic as was his famous successor, J. G. Machan. A. T. Robertson was champion extraordinary of the historico-grammatical method. When charges are made to the contrary, it is usually because the *science* of biblical criticism is being confused with the *negativism* of some biblical critics.

Turning now to Berkouwer's concept of biblical errancy for passing notice (since a thorough critique can be found elsewhere in this volume), we read:

Berkouwer commented that when error in the sense of incorrectness is used on the same level as error in the biblical sense of sin and deception we are quite far removed from the serious manner in which error is dealt with in Scripture.⁸²

Here Berkouwer seems to allow that the Bible may contain errors in the sense of "incorrectness" since these errors are not only a "level" with such errors as "sin and deception." This can only mean that if the Bible is the Word of God, then God can be incorrect, can err, can make mistakes, though he cannot deceive. This does more than "damage reverence for Scripture." This damages reverence for God, and illustrates a subtle form of *non sequitur* No. 3.

We realize that these are serious charges--but they are not unwarranted. However, they do not imply that those guilty are deliberately so. We believe they are not. We believe that if they ever see validity in our charge, they will, as earnest Christians, eschew their error in charging God in his Word with error.

⁸⁰Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1873) 1:391.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 337-338.

⁸²*Biblical Authority*, p. 44

Loretz in *Das Ende der Inspirations Theologie* entitles chapter 20 "*Die Wahrheit der Bibel--das theologische Pseudoproblem der absoluten Irrtumslosigkeit der Heilige Schrift*" (The Truth of the Bible--The Theological Pseudo Problem of the Absolute Inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures). He calls inerrancy a pseudoproblem and thus disposes of it as a nonissue. Why is it a false problem or nonproblem? Because the Bible is Semitic, and the concept of inerrancy is Greek: the Bible is affectional, inerrancy is rational; the Bible is nonlogical, inerrancy is logical. It is a case of apples and oranges, according to Loretz. Inerrancy simply asks the wrong questions and gets irrelevant answers. This is Rogers' theme with different names: *Semitic* for Platonic-Augustinian-Reformation-Berkouwer; *Greek* for Aristotelian-Thomistic-Scholastic-Warfield. But, of course, the Jews could think and the Greeks could feel, and the only thing "pseudo" in this whole matter is calling inerrancy a "pseudoproblem."

B. B. WARFIELD VS. G. C. BERKOUWER ON SCRIPTURE

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PAPER SUMMARY

This paper contrasts the views of Warfield and Berkouwer on Scripture. It is shown that their views, both as to Scripture as the Word of God and Scripture as the word of men, are totally and radically divergent. Their difference with regard to the inerrancy of the Bible exposes two antagonistic traditions of long standing.

B. B. WARFIELD VS. G. C. BERKOUWER ON SCRIPTURE

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INTRODUCTION

It may, at first, seem somewhat surprising to see Warfield pitted against Berkouwer. After all, Warfield had passed away before Berkouwer appeared on the theological scene. An open confrontation, therefore, never took place. There are at least two good reasons, however, for squaring off Warfield's position against that of Berkouwer.

First, Warfield and Berkouwer, men of acknowledged stature and pervasive influence, are increasingly recognized as the two most noted exponents of two divergent views of Scripture.¹ Warfield, undoubtedly the most distinguished representative of the Old Princeton position on Scripture, never grew tired in his extensive writings on the subject to defend the plenary, verbal inspiration, and therefore inerrancy, of the Bible. His repeated and thorough preoccupation with the inspiration of Scripture has not only placed a stamp on American Reformed and Presbyterian thought, but has even gained him the accolade of being the greatest contributor to this theme ever.² Berkouwer, on the other hand, an equally prolific writer, has the distinction--dubious in the eyes of many--of having become the fountainhead of a new type of thinking in the Reformed and evangelical world that, also in the area of Scripture, has left the old and traditional paths. His emphasis upon, and view of, the humanity of Scripture led him and his followers to the denial of its inerrancy.

Second, Warfield and Berkouwer appear to emerge not only as the two most noted exponents of two divergent views, but also as the modern day representatives of two positions, in whom two antagonistic traditions of long standing culminate. Berkouwer claims to discover Aristotelian influences in Warfield's approach to Scripture. His followers are even more explicit in their criticism. They charge that the Old Princeton school of Alexander, the Hodges, and Warfield fell victim to a scholastic methodology since it patterned its theology after Turretin, who allegedly was strongly influenced by Thomas Aquinas and the Aristotelian tradition and thus had deviated from the methodology of the Reformers. John Owen is said to be Turretin's counterpart in the British Isles. Thus the battle lines are drawn. On the one hand, there is the line of Aristotle, Thomas, Turretin, Owen, and Old Princeton, culminating in Warfield. On the other hand, still according to Warfield's critics, there is the line of Scripture, Augustine, the Reformers, the Westminster divines, Kuyper, Bavinck and, finally, Berkouwer.³ It must be added that one can easily reconstruct an equally telling

¹*Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers (Waco: Word Books, 1977), pp. 9-10.

²*God's Inerrant Word*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974), p. 115.

³G. C. Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift* (Kampen: Kok, 1966), vol. I, p. 34. E. t. *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 32; *Biblical Authority*, pp. 17-46, 152ff.

battle array from Warfield's works. He would place the line of Scripture, Augustine, the Reformers, the Westminster divines, and Old Princeton over against what he calls rationalistic and "mystical" thinkers. In the first category he places humanists such as Erasmus, Socinians, early Arminians, scholastic thinkers (sic!), and critical German scholars. They hold that the Bible is at best only in part inspired and therefore only in part authoritative. Some are of the opinion that only the mysteries of faith are inspired and not things that are discoverable by human reason. Others believe that Scripture is inspired in matters of faith and practice only and not in matters of history and science. Again others hold that the Bible is inspired in its thoughts and its concepts, but not in its words. Among the mystical thinkers he names specifically Schleiermacher and his followers. They generally subordinate all external authority to internal authority as they "define inspiration not as an activity of God rendering the Scriptural writings as such infallible and authoritative, but as they correlate to revelation in the process of the attainment of truth by the prophet himself--the subjective factor in the conception of divine truth by this chosen instrument of God."⁴

Quite possibly Warfield may be regarded as too general in describing those who object to the plenary inspiration of Scripture as either rationalistic or mystical thinkers and in characterizing Schleiermacher's position as mystical. It seems, indeed, questionable to identify Schleiermacher's sophisticated theological approach as mystical without any further explanation and to lump him together with earlier mystics without any differentiation. But Warfield cannot be faulted for holding that an errant view of Scripture has either rationalistic or "irrationalistic" (designated as mystical) roots. In fact, as will be demonstrated later, with this observation he points to, if not joins, the fundamental issue.

Given Warfield's general description and characterization of the battle lines, there is little doubt that he and Berkouwer would find themselves in opposite camps. In fact, there is every reason to believe that, according to Warfield, Berkouwer's emphasis upon, and usage of, the concept of "correlation" would betray a strand in his thinking that would place him in the climate of Schleiermacher's theology--and of neo-orthodoxy.⁵

All this is not to say that a comparison of Warfield and Berkouwer is without complications. On the contrary, it must be recognized that Warfield never had the opportunity to update and sharpen his arguments to face this new

⁴*Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), vol. 11, pp. 619-620; B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), pp. 112-114.

⁵It has been generally acknowledged that the concept of the correlation between faith and revelation is the essential element in Berkouwer's dogmatic methodology. Cf. G. E. Meuleman, "De correlatie van geloof en Openbaring bij G. C. Berkouwer," in *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, November 1965; A. D. R. Polman, "Berkouwer als Dogmaticus," in *Gereformeerd Weekblad*, October 8, 1965, and R. C. Sproul, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in *God's Inerrant Word*, p. 243.

challenge. Further, it ought to be noted that there are two phases to be distinguished in Berkouwer's thinking. In the first one his views are practically identical to those of Warfield. In fact in several instances Berkouwer adds new, incisive and helpful insights. In the second phase there is an unmistakable and decisive shift. Berkouwer becomes critical of Warfield and the position he espouses. He also explains in what way he believes to have moved beyond his first phase.⁶

These complications, however, should not be unduly pressed. After all, it may be said that Warfield's statement and defense of the case of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is so thorough and perceptive that to a great extent the challenge posed by Berkouwer and his followers seems to have been anticipated and countered implicitly and principally. Also, Berkouwer's shift brings his new position into even sharper focus. This will, if anything, enhance the fruitfulness of an encounter between the two "point-men" in the present debate about Scripture.

In the main body of the paper, that now follows, two major issues will be analyzed, under the following headings:

- I. Scripture as God's Word
- II. Scripture as man's word

Each section will compare the views of Warfield, the early Berkouwer, and the later Berkouwer, in that order. A final appraisal will be presented in the conclusion.

⁶H. Berkhof, "De methode van Berkouwer's theologie" in *Ex Auditū Verbi*, eds. R. Schippers, G. E. Meuleman, J. T. Bakker, H. M. Kuitert (Kampen: Kok, 1965), pp. 44-48, is of the opinion that Berkouwer's thinking can be divided into three phases. In the first phase he maintains the "absolute authority of Scripture," in the second phase he emphasizes the "redemptive contents of Scripture," and in the third phase the focus shifts to the "existential scope of Scripture." This was reported to the American public by R. C. Sproul in *God's Inerrant Word*, pp. 243-244. What has not been reported, however, is that Berkouwer has acknowledged the transition from the first to the second phase, but objected to the construct of a third phase. Cf. F. W. Buytendach, *Aspekte van die vorm/inhoud-problematiek met betrekking tot die organiese skrifinspirasie in die nuwere Gereformeerde theologie in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1972), pp. 330-331. It appears that Berkhof's analysis of the second and third phase leaves something to be desired. In the first phase he called for the recognition of the centrality of the contents of Scripture. In the second phase, however, he emphasized the contents in contrast to, and at the expense of, the form. This is a marked difference with the first phase, where form and contents were inseparable. Further, Berkhof's description of the third phase creates the impression that eventually a Bultmannian type of existentialist theology came to place its stamp on Berkouwer's thinking. This is not defensible. His theologizing, following the shift away from his original position, bears throughout the mark of the influence of Karl Barth. This has been correctly observed by A. D. R. Polman. Cf. Buytendach, *Aspekte*, p. 333. Hence it is preferable to speak of two phases, the second of which would not have been possible without, and increasingly shows, the influence of the Barthian type of neo-orthodoxy.

Warfield has expressed his views on Scripture in the form of addresses and articles, most of which have been collected in the two volumes, already referred to, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* and *Selected Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. II. Berkouwer published his original position in his *The Problem of Biblical Criticism*.⁷ His later thought is reflected in numerous articles as well as three published works, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, *Holy Scripture*, and *A Half Century of Theology*.⁸ These six volumes form the basis for the comparison.

SCRIPTURE AS GOD'S WORD

Warfield

Fundamental to Warfield's position on Scripture is his view of "inspiration." He develops this view from the two classical passages, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. The former states that "every Scripture" is *theopneustos*, and therefore profitable for a variety of purposes. The latter predicates of "every prophecy of Scripture" that "men as they were 'borne along' by the Holy Spirit spoke (them) from God."

In conjunction with 2 Timothy 3:16, Warfield points out that the term "inspiration," which is not a biblical term, leaves a lot to be desired. Only because it is too firmly fixed in the common ecclesiastical and theological parlance is he willing to maintain it as the technical designation of the action of God in giving the Scriptures. Under no circumstances, however, may it receive its meaning from etymological implications or historical considerations. It was introduced in the church by the Latin translation, the Vulgate, of 2 Timothy 3:16 and eventually adopted by the King James version as well as by most other translations.⁹ Warfield emphasizes that the Greek term *theopneustos* does not denote "inspiring" or "inspiration," but rather "spiring" and "spiration." This implies that the Scripture is not a human product "breathed into" the human writers by God, but rather a divine product "breathed out" by God through the instrumentality of human authors. Writes Warfield:

What it says of Scripture is, not that it is "breathed into by God" or is the product of Divine "inbreathing" into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, "God-breathed," the product of the creative breath of God. In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them. No term could have been chosen, however, which would have more emphatically asserted

⁷G. C. Berkouwer, *Het probleem der Schriftkritiek* (Kampen: Kok, n.d.). Regrettably this book has never been translated into the English language.

⁸G. C. Berkouwer, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), and *A Half Century of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

⁹Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, pp. 153-154.

the Divine production of Scripture than that which is here employed. The "breath of God" is in Scripture just the symbol of His almighty power, the bearer of his creative Word. . . . When Paul declares, then, that "every scripture," or "all scripture" is the product of the Divine breath, "is God-breathed," he asserts with as much energy as he could employ that Scripture is the product of a specifically Divine operation.¹⁰

Thus 2 Timothy 3:16 conveys that Scripture is of divine origination, and precisely for that reason is of such value for so many purposes.

In 2 Peter 1:21, Peter complements the teaching of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16. He states as well that "every prophecy of Scripture," most likely encompassing the totality of Scripture and thus comparable to Paul's "every scripture," is of divine origin. Men spoke from God! In addition to this, however, he emphasizes the agency of the Spirit. Thus the Scripture as a divine product came about because the Holy Spirit brought the human instruments to the goal set for them by God.

Warfield observes that in this context:

the proximate stress is laid . . . , not on the spiritual value of Scripture . . . , but on the Divine trustworthiness of Scripture. Because this is the way every prophecy of Scripture "has been brought," it affords a more sure basis of confidence than even the testimony of human witnesses.¹¹

In his article, entitled "God-inspired Scripture," Warfield returns once more to the subject matter. The major point he wishes to get across is that the term *theopneustos* has a passive, rather than an active or quasi-active meaning, which underscores that Scripture originates in God and not in man. The conclusion of his article will function as an appropriate summary of his views on "inspiration."

What is *theopneustos* is "God-breathed," produced by the creative breath of the Almighty. And Scripture is called *theopneustos* in order to designate it as "God-breathed," the product of Divine spiration, the creation of that Spirit who is in all the spheres of the Divine activity the executive of the Godhead. . . . What it affirms is that the Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation. It is on this foundation of Divine origin that all the high attributes of Scripture are built.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 133.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 137.

¹² Ibid., p. 296.

Warfield does not only show that the God-breathed character of Scripture secures once and for all that it is the Word of God, fit for its purposes and reliable in its contents, but also adduces corroborating evidence to that effect in a variety of articles.

First, Warfield researches the terms "Scripture" and "Scriptures," the phrase "the oracles of God," and the formula "It is written."

As to the terms "Scripture" and "Scriptures," he demonstrates that whether the singular or the plural is employed,

the application of the term to the OT writings by the writers of the NT is based upon the conception of these OT writings as a unitary whole, and designates this body of writings in their entirety as the one well-known authoritative documentation of the Divine word . . . as a single document set over against all other documents by reason of its unique Divinity and indefectible authority, by which it is constituted in every passage and declaration the final arbiter of belief and practice.¹³

With regard to the phrase "the oracles of God" (occurring in Acts 7:38, Rom. 3:12, Heb. 5:12, 1 Pet. 4:11), Warfield concludes a study of it as follows:

The designation of the Scriptures as *ta logia tou theou* fairly shouts to us out of the pages of the New Testament that to its writers the Scriptures of the Old Testament were the very Word of God in the highest and strictest sense that term can bear--the express utterance, in all their parts and each and every of their words, of the Most High--the "oracles of God."¹⁴

He comes to a similar conclusion following the examination of the rather common formula, "It is written."

When a NT writer says, "It is written," there can arise no doubt where what he thus adduces as possessing absolute authority over the thought and consciences of men is to be found written. The simple adduction in this solemn and decisive manner of a written authority, carries with it the implication that the appeal is made to the indefectible authority of the Scriptures of God, which in all their parts and in every one of their declarations are clothed with the authority of God Himself.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., pp. 234-235, 238-239.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 407.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 240.

Second, Warfield brings out a variety of ways in which the New Testament writers simply take their point of departure in the absolute identification of Scripture as the Word of God. The following list will serve to show this.

- (1) Scripture passages of the Old Testament, which are quoted, referred to, or alluded to in the New Testament, are introduced as spoken by God either explicitly or implicitly (see Matt. 19:4ff.; Mark 10:5ff.; Acts 13:34ff.; Rom. 15:9ff.; 1 Cor. 6:16; 2 Cor. 6:2; Gal. 3:16; Eph. 4:8, 5:14; Heb. 1:5ff. and 8:8). At times the human instrumentality is mentioned (see Matt. 1:22 and 2:15).
- (2) Vice versa, words that are spoken in the Old Testament by God are introduced as spoken by Scripture (see Rom. 9:17 and Gal. 3:18).
- (3) Scripture passages of the Old Testament, quoted in the New Testament, are introduced as spoken by the Holy Spirit (see Heb. 3:7 and 9:8). For the additional mention of human instrumentality, see Acts 1:16.
- (4) Formulae as "God says," and "The Spirit says," are stated in the present tense, indicating that the Bible is the living Word of God here and now (see Acts 13:35; Rom. 15:10; Heb. 1:7-10 and 3:7).
- (5) An Old Testament quotation is at one occasion characterized by the Lord Jesus as both the Word of God and as Scripture "that cannot be broken" (see John 10:34-35).
- (6) At other occasions a verb in the present tense and a noun in the singular, that occur in an Old Testament passage quoted in the New Testament as spoken by God, are shown to be fundamental for essential doctrines. Even the minutest parts of Scripture as the Word of God contain a message (see Matt. 22:32 and Gal. 3:16).

This list impressively shows the close identification of God and Scripture in the minds of the New Testament writers.¹⁶

Third, Warfield pays special attention to the nature and authority of the New Testament. He recognizes that the evidence presented in the previous section technically only pertains to the Old Testament. But he proceeds to demonstrate that the New Testament writings are in the same category as those of the Old Testament. The authors of the New Testament regard the books of the New Testament as Scripture and on a par with the Scripture of the Old Testament (see 2 Pet. 3:16). They quote the Old Testament and the New Testament in the same context and as having the same authority (see 1 Tim. 5:18). They write with authority (see 2 Thess. 3:6, 12; 2 Cor. 10:8). They attest that their authority comes from God (see 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 4:2, 15). They impose their writings on the church as the touchstone for fellowship (see 2 Thess. 3:14). They insist that the church listen to them rather than to angels (see Gal. 1:7, 8). All this is possible because they were instruments of the Spirit of God (see 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:13).¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 138-149, 229-240, 299-348, 351-407. Note especially p. 426 and *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. II, p. 635.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 163-164, 426-427. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. II, pp. 539-540.

From all this evidence only one conclusion can be drawn. Scripture in its totality, comprising both Old and New Testaments, is a divine product, be it through human mediation. It is the Word of God, and thus fully authoritative and fully functional for its purposes.

The Early Berkouwer

The early Berkouwer uses both the terms "theopneustic" and "inspired" in conjunction with Scripture. Neither one of them, however, does he examine and define as such. His major interest is the exploration of the meaning and implications of "organic inspiration," in contradistinction to "mechanical inspiration." But in discussing the designation "organic inspiration" he provides sufficient ground to conclude that at this stage his view of inspiration is parallel to that of Warfield. He states that the theopneusty of Scripture, taught in 2 Timothy 3:16, points to an organic inspiration, in which there is "a *taking into service* of the total man with his own personality and his activity" (organic), and the "divine, sovereign act . . . , the effect of which came to us in the trustworthy and infallible Scripture" (inspiration).¹⁸ While Berkouwer mentions both aspects, it must be added that at this stage of his thinking the primacy belongs to the latter. In conjunction with 2 Peter 1:20-21, he emphasizes that private interpretation is not permitted, precisely because the human writers were driven by the Spirit. There are human authors. There is human mediation. But the word of prophecy is not a human matter, nor does it breathe a human atmosphere, for the simple reason that it did not proceed from man, but from the Spirit. The human element always must be viewed in the light of the divine origin. This gives to the prophetic word its depth, fullness, and authority, and demands from its interpreters respect both for that word and for the purpose of the Spirit with that word.¹⁹

Against this backdrop Berkouwer's usage of the word mystery must be understood. When he speaks about the "mystery of the Spirit" and the "mystery of the written *Word of God*," he wishes to indicate that the way in which God through the agency of the Spirit and the instrumentality of sinful men produced a trustworthy and infallible document is beyond human comprehension. This is important to remember, inasmuch as in his later thinking the word mystery receives a different connotation.²⁰

The attempt that Berkouwer makes to corroborate his position, that Scripture is the Word of God without any qualification and reservation, is minimal compared to that of Warfield. But it is no less telling. He points to the formula, "It is written." Biblical criticism, in his opinion, has never seriously considered the unalterable opposition, contained in these words, to any and every attempt to drive a wedge between Scripture and the Word of God.²¹ The reason why Berkouwer does not turn to further evidence seems to

¹⁸Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, pp. 315-318.

¹⁹Berkouwer, "De mening des Geestes," in *Gereformeerd Weekblad*, January 6, 13, 20, 1961.

²⁰Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, p. 293.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 387-390.

be twofold. First, his early work on biblical criticism is apologetic in nature, rather than exegetical. Second, his view of Scripture as the trustworthy and infallible Word of God is so settled that he takes it as the absolute and unassailable point of departure.

The Later Berkouwer

In his later phase, Berkouwer filled the vacuum that was present in his earlier work. He now deals extensively with the notion of the *theopneusty* of Scripture in connection with 2 Timothy 3:16. Lexicographically, he is in full accord with Warfield. With Warfield he rejects inspiration as an acceptable translation. With Warfield he stresses the passive meaning of the term. The final conclusion, however, is subtly different.

Thus, *theopneustos* points to an essential relationship between the breath of the Spirit and the *graphie*. This is the mystery of Scripture which the church desired to express in its confession. This mystery is the uniqueness through which Holy Scripture in all its humanity was distinguished from all other human writings . . . one hears in this passage that the written Scripture cannot be understood in a correct way without the breath of the Spirit.²²

This statement is fallacious on two counts. First, the emphasis is upon Scripture in all its humanity. This is not the emphasis of Scripture. Neither is it the emphasis of Warfield. The latter correctly observes that 2 Timothy 3:16 brings Scripture as a divine product into focus. Second, the context of the statement makes clear that the humanity of Scripture should not be distinguished from the humanity of other human writings. Thus the "mystery of the Scriptures" has a connotation that is vastly different from that in Berkouwer's early work. Then, Berkouwer wished to convey that Scripture is word for word identical with the infallible Word of God in spite of its human mediation. Now, he intends to say that Scripture is used by God in spite of its fallible humanity that it shares with other writings.²³

The same subtle, but fundamental difference is noticeable in Berkouwer's discussion of 2 Peter 1:21. Writes Berkouwer:

The . . . "from God" gives a unique quality of trustworthiness to these human words, which is essential to the God-breathed Scripture. . . . The firmness of these human words is the mystery of the Spirit.²⁴

²²Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, p. 140.

²³Cf. Berkouwer, "Vragen rondom de Belijdenis," in *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, February 1961, pp. 1-41, spec. 36-37. In this article Berkouwer asks the suggestive question, whether the Word of God, which transcends every confession of the church, does not imply that also Scripture, fully human as it is, shares in the relativity of every human testimony. He does not see any difference between the humanity of Scripture and the humanity of other writings. To insist on such a difference would amount to an unwarranted "supranaturalization" of Scripture. Cf. Buytendach, *Aspekte*, pp. 340-341.

²⁴Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, p. 142.

Again, this quotation is objectionable for two reasons. First, the stress is upon the humanity of the words. The text, however, states that what the prophets spoke is the firm Word of God. The human mediation is brought into view. But the emphasis is upon the divine origin and the divine characteristics of the prophetic word. This is also Warfield's conclusion. Second, the subtlety of this quotation cannot really be grasped until, once again, it is understood what "humanity" implies for Berkouwer. What Berkouwer is saying can be paraphrased as follows. The human words of Scripture, that are no different from all other human words and therefore cannot lay claim to trustworthiness and firmness, receive the quality of trustworthiness and firmness from God. That is the "mystery of the Spirit." Once again, the mystery is not that the prophetic word is firm, although it is produced through human mediation, but rather that the prophetic word is firm in spite of its fallibility.²⁵

The difference between Warfield and Berkouwer, which at first may be somewhat difficult to spot, is indeed fundamental. Warfield (and the early Berkouwer) place the emphasis upon the divine element in Scripture. Scripture has a divine origin and is a divine product. As such it is trustworthy to the reader and fit for its purpose. The later Berkouwer gives center stage to the humanity of Scripture, its human origin, its human composition, its human understanding, and its human relativity. The emphasis upon the human element in connection with 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 does not reflect the contents and scope of these passages, but is certainly in line with Berkouwer's general approach.

All this is not to say that Berkouwer refuses to speak about Scripture as the Word of God. Quite the contrary! He maintains that *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei*. But what does he mean by this phrase?

In stating his view of Scripture as the Word of God he does not build up his case exegetically. Instead he takes his point of departure in an undeniable and, in his opinion, legitimate fact of the history of biblical studies. This fact is the rise of the critical-historical method. Historical criticism focused the attention upon the Scriptures as human writings, was based upon the irrefutable fact that its authors were human, and was fueled by the conviction that one should not continue to speak about the divine side of Scripture only. This precipitated a crisis with regard to Scripture as the Word of God. To Berkouwer this crisis was unavoidable:

An honest approach to Scripture through historical examination simply had to result in questioning the church's traditional confession that *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei*. For various reasons students of Scripture began to wonder more and more whether Holy Scripture as God's Word was truly beyond all criticism as the indubitable *vox Dei*, as a book--however human--of indisputably divine signature.²⁶

²⁵Cf. Buytendach, *Aspekte*, pp. 415-419.

²⁶Cf. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 14-15. See also pp. 67 and 111.

Berkouwer declares himself not at all unhappy with this development. In fact, he sees a distinct possibility that the critical-historical examination of Scripture will improve the understanding and proclamation of its message. Hence he does not mind that the church once again must face the "question concerning the meaning of *est* in the confession: *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei*."²⁷

To react to the critical historical method in a manner that extols the divine aspect of Scripture and renders the human element insignificant or irrelevant is unacceptable to Berkouwer. He characterizes that as a "docetic" approach. Docetism in Christology emphasizes the divinity of Christ at the expense of his humanity. Berkouwer warns that the church should never follow this pattern in its approach to Scripture and minimize or obscure the human aspect.²⁸

In this context Berkouwer is critical of the post-Reformation theology with its stress upon the "unique, supernatural, divine quality of Holy Scripture." In his opinion, the view of Scripture that this theology espouses, however influential it may have become, is Aristotelian and faulty. Writes Berkouwer:

This faulty view has occurred as theologians in immediate relation to . . . certainty, began to interpret the word *est* in the expression *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei* in such a manner that Scripture's divinity was thought to be found in its inner substantial form and had become an essential predicate of Holy Scripture as an inspired book that was elevated to the level of a source of supernatural truths.²⁹

Berkouwer's objection to the post-Reformation theology is threefold. In analyzing this threefold objection it will also become clear how he himself intends to handle the crisis of the "controversial Bible," and in which way he understands and subscribes to the phrase *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei*.

First, Berkouwer protests against the notion that Scripture is to be regarded as a "stupendous, supernatural miracle," in which the "human words are transsubstantiated into something divine." Over against that he does not tire of stressing that Scripture is a prophetic-apostolic and consequently human, testimony, witness or attestation. Writes Berkouwer:

The way of the Word did not exclude the ministry of man. Throughout Scripture we see that man comes to the fore in his ministry and witness. The fact that Scripture and the prophets are *from God* . . . does not rule out the human witness in divine monergism, but includes this witness in a unique manner. God's Word has not come to us as a stupendous supernatural miracle that shies away from every

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-18. See for the charge of docetism the analysis and rebuttal by Sproul in *God's Inerrant Word*, pp. 255-256.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

link with the human in order thus to be truly divine.
 Rather, when God speaks, human voices ring in our ears.³⁰

The nature of the phrase *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei* must be understood against this backdrop. Berkouwer holds that God reaches out to man in the form of the human words of Scripture. When man is confronted with Scripture, however, he hears, first of all, "human voices." When he is taught by the Spirit, he will recognize in these voices the Word of God and acknowledge this as such. The phrase *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei* is such an acknowledgement on the part of the church. It is a response to human words. It is a confessional response to human words. It is a confessional response that these human words are the Word of God. Writes Berkouwer, "Of the humanly written (*Scriptura*) it is confessed: *est Verbum Dei*," and "The 'is' of the confession . . . relates the mystery of God's Word to the wholly human witness."³¹

Second, Berkouwer objects strenuously to a formalized conception of Scripture and its attributes as well as a formalized submission thereto. A formalized approach to both the conception of and submission to Scripture, according to Berkouwer, will isolate the Scripture in its written form from the contents of Scripture, the message of the Gospel. Berkouwer states that the relationship between God's speaking and the human word can without exaggeration be described as identity. In this connection he refers to many of the passages and phrases that Warfield discussed. He pays specific attention to the formula, "It is written." In fact, he reminisces how in his earlier work he was powerfully gripped by it, and how on the strength of the adherence to this formula, in his estimation, the Reformed view of Scripture was driven into isolation. He still expresses his commitment to this formula as well as other phrases and passages that identify Scripture as the Word of God. But . . . he now declares himself an unalterable foe of any formalized identity. Writes he, thus disclosing a second aspect of the nature of the phrase *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei*:

The confession concerning Scripture--with its emphatic "is"--does not imply the worship of a book. At issue is whether and in what way faith is related to the "gospel promised in Holy Scripture." Scripture is central because of its nature and intent. For this Scripture is only referred to because its sense and intent is the divine message of salvation . . . the written Word of God can never be formally isolated, because precisely that written Scripture testifies of salvation and is directed toward salvation. And in that context words can become living words . . . , full of authority. In "It is written" lies the perspective of God's speaking and the power and blessings of the written Word.³²

³⁰ Ibid., p. 145. See also pp. 22, 37, 50, 73, 104, 148, 150-152, and 167.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 143, 145, 148, and 164.

³² Ibid., pp. 147 and 149. See also Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, pp. 139-141.

The phrase, in short, is a confessional statement on the part of the church that the human voices of Scripture constitute the Word of God, but only by virtue of the gospel contained in them.

Third, Berkouwer opposes strongly the idea that the identification of Scripture as the Word of God is an *a priori* postulate, an epistemological issue or a transcendental presupposition. He insists that reflection upon, and confession with regard to, Scripture, its nature, its attributes, and its function, must originate in and proceed from a Spirit-taught heart, a walk of faith, and a life of submission to the message of Scripture.³³ Thus the third aspect of *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei* emerges. It is a confessional statement that is uttered in faith, which in turn is accompanied by subjection to the contents of Scripture.

In summary, the Scriptures can be called the Word of God, in fact, can be identified as such. But this can only have meaning when it is done by way of a confession that has in view the contents of Scripture and is rooted in genuine faith.

The gap between Warfield and Berkouwer appears to be immense. Warfield holds that the Scripture is the Word of God, and that the phrase *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei* is true and meaningful, whether confessed or not, both in contents and in form, whether believed or not. So does the early Berkouwer. The later Berkouwer calls this an Aristotelian position. The biblical evidence that Warfield adduced to substantiate his position apparently did not make an impact upon Berkouwer. Even Berkouwer's early work proved unsatisfactory to him. The question must eventually be faced why the later Berkouwer made the shift in the face of the biblical evidence and against his own earlier convictions. Before this can be determined, however, a comparison will be made as to the humanity of Scripture.

SCRIPTURE AS MAN'S WORD

Warfield

Since Warfield characterized Scripture not as much as a human product breathed into by the Spirit, but rather as a divine product breathed out by God through the instrumentality of the human authors,³⁴ the question becomes pressing how he envisions the relationship of the divine and the human with regard to Scripture. Does he emphasize the divine element to the point that Scripture is deified and its humanity is relegated to obscurity, or even excluded? The answer to this question must be decidedly in the negative. Warfield rejects the so-called mechanical theory of Scripture production, in which inspiration is conceived as dictation and the human writers regarded as implements rather than instruments and as pens rather than pensmen.³⁵ He marshalls several arguments against the mechanical theory by showing that Scripture is fully

³³ Ibid., pp. 49, 142, 149, and 308.

³⁴ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, p. 143.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 437. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, p. 545.

man's word. First, he points to the numerous times the New Testament refers to Scripture in terms of its human authors (see Matt. 22:24; Mark 12:19; John 12:39; Rom. 11:9; etc.). Second, he brings out that passages of the Old Testament are quoted in the New Testament as spoken by men, even if they were "in the Spirit" (see Mark 12:36). Third, he emphasizes the obvious marks of human authorship, as peculiarities and differences in vocabulary and style.³⁶

While Warfield rejects the dictation theory, he is just as critical of the opposite extreme, which in his opinion is the more common error, namely the exclusion of the divine factor from the origin and nature of Scripture. While Scripture is fully man's word, it is not a purely human book.³⁷

In rejecting both extremes, Scripture as a purely divine or as a purely human book, Warfield does not opt for the solution of a partly divine and partly human Scripture. The Bible is not divided between two factors that are mutually exclusive, so that the one limits the other and the entrance of the one spells the exit of the other.³⁸ No, the evidence that shows the Scripture both as the Word of God and the word of man leads to the conclusion that the Bible is simultaneously divine, the utterance of God, and human, the free product of man's effort. Writes Warfield:

The human and divine factors in inspiration are conceived of as flowing confluent and harmoniously to the production of a common product. Of every word of Scripture is it to be affirmed, in turn, that it is God's word and that it is man's word. All the qualities of divinity and humanity are to be sought and found in every portion and element of the Scripture. While, on the other hand, no quality inconsistent with either divinity and humanity can be found in any portion or element of Scripture.³⁹

The concept, in which the Bible is regarded as both a human product in every part and every word and a divine product to the smallest detail, Warfield calls *concursumus*. Both the divine and human element form the inseparable constituents of one simple uncompounded product, in which the human coloration and variety as well as the divine perfection and infallibility are acknowledged.⁴⁰ Thus Warfield holds that according to the Word of God and the doctrine of the church,

by a special, supranatural, extraordinary influence of the Holy Ghost, the sacred writers have been guided in

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 151-152, 421-422, 437-438. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, pp. 542-544, 628.

³⁷ *Selected Shorter Writings*, p. 544.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 546, 630-631.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 547. See also pp. 629, 631, and *Inspiration and Authority*, p. 158.

⁴⁰ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, p. 422. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, pp. 624, 631.

their writing in such a way, as while their humanity was not superseded, it was yet so dominated that their words became at the same time the words of God, and thus, in every case and all alike, absolutely infallible.⁴¹

Warfield emphasizes that the concept of *concursum* is not unique to the relationship of the divine and human factor with regard to the origin and nature of Scripture. He points out that the same relationship obtains with regard to the act of faith as a work of God and an activity of man.⁴²

It must be evident by now that Warfield holds to the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Scriptures as the Word of God,⁴³ which by virtue of that are fully true, fully authoritative, fully infallible,⁴⁴ and fully inerrant.⁴⁵ Because of the present controversy on the inerrancy of Scripture, Warfield's view on that issue will now be explored further. The following quotation will both serve as a summary of Warfield's position stated thus far and set the stage for the discussion of his view of inerrancy.

The Church, then, has held from the beginning that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will. It has always recognized that this concept of co-authorship implies that the Spirit's superintendence extends to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship--thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (inerrancy).⁴⁶

It must be noted in connection with this statement that Warfield did not construe a difference between infallibility and inerrancy. The substance of the one term is the substance of the other.⁴⁷ It is this substance that is in view when he writes:

⁴¹Ibid. See yet p. 160.

⁴²Ibid., p. 160.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 108, 116-119, 127, 171. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, pp. 588, 593, 627.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 420 for fully true, pp. 140, 144-145, 158, 161, 316, for fully authoritative, and pp. 112, 420 for fully infallible. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, pp. 537ff.

⁴⁵For references see notes 46ff.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁷See yet *ibid.*, pp. 173 and 420, where Warfield makes virtually identical statements about the nature of Scripture and uses infallible in the one and inerrant in the other context. The terms are clearly interchangeable.

The Bible is inspired not *in part* but *fully* in all its elements alike . . . matters of history and science as well as of faith and practice, words as well as thoughts.⁴⁸

The whole of Scripture in all its parts and in all its elements, down to the least minutiae, in form of expression as well as in substance of teaching, is from God . . . (and has) a quality which is truly superhuman.⁴⁹

(There is) the ineradicable inability of the whole negative school to distinguish between *difficulties* and *proven errors*. If then we ask what we are to do with the numerous phenomena of Scripture inconsistent with verbal inspiration, which, so it is alleged, "criticism" has brought to light, we must reply: Challenge them in the name of the New Testament doctrine and ask for their credentials. They have no credentials that can stand before that challenge. No single error has as yet been demonstrated to occur in the Scriptures as given by God to His church. And every critical student knows . . . that the progress of investigation has been a continuous process of removing difficulties, until scarcely a shred of the old list of "Biblical Errors" remains to hide the nakedness of this moribund contention.⁵⁰

In the final analysis, Warfield holds to his views on Scripture, its plenary, verbal, inspiration, its truth, its authority, its infallibility/inerrancy, because it is based on the "exegetical fact," "the common place of exegetical science," of the witness of Scripture, of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the apostles.⁵¹ Furthermore, he sees this witness reflected in the views of the apostolic church, of Augustine, of the Reformers, of the Westminster divines, and of the later British theologians.⁵² He even sees this witness recognized by scholars who personally reject the high view of Scripture.⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 150, 158.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 225. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, p. 633.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 116-119, 128, 175ff., 180, 218-219, 427-428. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, p. 635.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 107-109. Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, pp. 572ff. Note the several quotations given on these pages. They show that inerrancy was a doctrine that was universally accepted by the church. For further supporting evidence, see *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), *passim*, Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 147-174, and *God's Inerrant Word*, *passim*.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 175, 196, 200. Warfield refers to Farrar's admission that Paul regarded Scripture as "absolutely infallible even in accidental details and passing allusions." Cf. *Selected Shorter Writings*, p. 634.

Obedient to the witness of Scripture, of Christ, and of the apostles, buoyed by the heartfelt acknowledgement of this witness on the part of the church and even assisted by the grudging admission of the fact of that witness by critical scholars, Warfield went time and again about the wearisome business of refuting those who, in his own words, were "ever bringing forth 'novelties' from the waste paper basket of the past."⁵⁴

Thus he resists "attempts to make the use of the Septuagint by the New Testament writers, in their quotations from the Old Testament, into an argument against plenary inspiration."⁵⁵

Thus he responds to the objections against inerrancy arising from the fact that the original autographs are no longer extant, the subsequent copies are not without blemish, and the translations are not perfect.⁵⁶

Thus he criticized the assertion of accommodation on the part of the biblical authors, as if they presented mistaken views, adopted from their contemporaries, as truths.⁵⁷

Thus he points out that "not a single case of error can be proved," whether "historical," "doctrinal," or "scientific."⁵⁸

It is fitting to quote at this point the closing statements of one of Warfield's addresses. It summarizes his stand and the goal of this stand.

But how can I close without expression of thanks to him who has loved us so as to give us so pure a record of His will,--God-given in all its parts, even though cast in the forms of human speech,--infallible in all its statements,--divine even to the smallest particle! . . . Let us bless God . . . for His inspired Word! And may He grant that we may always cherish, love, venerate it, and conform all our life and thinking to it! So may we find safety for our feet, and peaceful security for our souls.⁵⁹

The Early Berkouwer

As to the humanity of Scripture, the early Berkouwer is in complete agreement with Warfield. Over against the theory of mechanical inspiration he opts for the so-called "organic inspiration." With this terminology he wishes to convey that inspiration is an act of God's Spirit in which he takes the total man with his personality, his cultural milieu, and his historical setting into his

⁵⁴*Selected Shorter Writings*, p. 550.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 549-559, especially 558-559.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 580-594.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 189-195.

⁵⁸Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, p. 440.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 441-442.

service. This guarantees that the Scripture is a fully human book. Berkouwer is quite aware that this evokes new problems and dangers. The temptation is there to construe under the cover of the phrase "organic inspiration" a human factor that is independent of, competitive with, or even inimical to the divine factor. Thus one may regard certain words, thoughts, and concepts in Scripture sections (as Gen. 1-3) simply as human input. This input, then, would reflect an antiquated science, a different view of history or an outdated culture, and may, therefore, under no circumstances be identified with, or qualify as, universally valid, divine, communication. This usage of the term "organic," in Berkouwer's opinion, endangers the divine inspiration. It is hardly surprising that he proceeds to condemn this approach in no uncertain terms as an unacceptable and unwarranted dualism of the divine and human factor. He charges that this dualism is born out of the desire to compromise with certain results of science that are allegedly unassailable, and apart from this dualism could not be assimilated in the thinking of the Christian. He argues that it constitutes a capitulation for a type of accommodation of the divine revelation that destroys the trustworthiness of Holy Scripture. He concludes that it violates the mystery of Scripture as both Word of God and word of man and is on a par with the several theories that claim to have found the key that opens the door to the discovery of the real Word of God in the Scriptures.

Berkouwer's own view is that the doctrine of the organic inspiration of Scripture only serves its purpose when it produces an ever increasing understanding of the Scripture as the Word of God. The reason is simple. It was designed to convey that the divine act of inspiration takes the human factor into its service in such a way that it produces the one infallible Word of God. It points, therefore, to the mystery and miracle of Scripture. Through imperfect human instruments and in an incomprehensible manner God the Holy Spirit saw fit to give to mankind the utterly and completely trustworthy Word of God.⁶⁰

It is remarkable how parallel the views of the early Berkouwer run to those of Warfield. Both hold that in the inspiration of Scripture the Spirit of God displays his omnipotence in the utilization of human instruments in such a fashion that to be human is no longer identical with being fallible and errant. A fully trustworthy and infallible Bible is the result.⁶¹

⁶⁰Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, pp. 314-353, especially pp. 314-319, 322-323, 326-327, 352-353.

⁶¹The wording of this conclusion resembles closely a statement by the early Berkouwer, quoted in Buytendach, *Aspekte*, p. 332. It is interesting to note that also with regard to the parallel between incarnation and inscripturation the views of the early Berkouwer and Warfield are practically identical. Just as Warfield, Berkouwer refuses to press the analogy too heavily. Just as Warfield, at the same time, he speaks about the wonder of a pure and trustworthy revelation that came about in spite of the weakness of human instrumentality and the inadequacy of human language and because of the powerful influence of the Spirit. Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, pp. 353-383, especially pp. 381-382.

Also with regard to the inerrancy of Scripture one finds the early Berkouwer in complete agreement with Warfield.

First, with him he holds to Scripture as the written Word of God by virtue of its inspiration and, therefore, to its complete trustworthiness, its absolute authority, and its full infallibility.⁶²

Second, there is no evidence that he distinguishes infallibility and inerrancy. In fact, at one point he uses these terms interchangeably.⁶³

Third, he demonstrates that the Reformed tradition--the extent to which he introduces historical arguments for the doctrine of inspiration--consistently has defended the inspiration and infallibility/inerrancy of Scripture.⁶⁴

Fourth, he speaks out against the theory that the Bible authors as well as the Lord Jesus Christ, knowingly or unknowingly, accommodated their teachings to false or errant views peculiar to their times. This, of course, would at least partially jeopardize the truth and trustworthiness of these teachings. An example of such accommodation would be the presentation of an outdated and unacceptable cosmology. Berkouwer's solution to this and similar problems is twofold. At times the Bible adapts itself to the level of the hearers or readers. This may prevent the total truth from being told. But it certainly does not imply that falsehoods are conveyed. Adaptation, therefore, must be sharply distinguished from accommodation. At other times, Scripture uses the language of observation, which is common to all men of all ages. It is a language that does not aim at scientific precision. Therefore, it may not be accused of conveying scientific falsehoods. Again, observation language must be sharply distinguished from accommodation. The aforementioned example falls in the category of observation language.⁶⁵

Fifth, he emphasizes that the Reformed concept of Scripture as the inspired, trustworthy, authoritative, infallible, inerrant Word of God forces it into a unique, but isolated and lonely position. In commenting on this position, however, he directs this important warning to his readers:

If the isolation of the Reformed view of Scripture is truly of significance, then it may not consist of an utterance of a formal-theoretical persuasion as to the quality of the Bible, but must be indissolubly connected with the actual listening and submission to the authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of the living God. The confession of the authority and infallibility of Scripture is not an *empty a priori*, which later can be "filled"

⁶²Cf. Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, pp. 323, 353, 389 for the trustworthiness of Scripture, pp. 256, 265, 316, 384, 387, 388 for its authority, and pp. 326, 355 for its infallibility. See p. 250 for all three.

⁶³*Ibid.*, pp. 203, 205-206.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 252ff.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 322ff.

with a variety of contents, but a confession which has significance for *all of life* and in the submission of life in everyday reality to the authority of Scripture it will prove, to what extent the isolation is, indeed, seriously meant.

He who accepts the Reformed confession with regard to Scripture in the full sense of the words is deeply convinced that it is not a matter of a purely-theoretical persuasion as to the "quality" of Holy Scripture, but a confession that only then is truly a confession of faith when it is accepted and verbalized *in* faithful submission to the authority of the Word of the Lord. It is a confession that does not stand "by itself," but a confession of faith in Jesus Christ who comes to us in the Word.⁶⁶

Berkouwer's message is clear. A truly biblical view of Scripture and all its attributes meets--at least--three requirements. It is not as much a matter of the mind (formal-theoretical, purely-theoretical), as it is a matter of the heart (confession of faith). It is not as much a verbal pronouncement (confession), as it is an expression of an obedient life (submission to authority). It is not as much an abstract entity ("by itself"), as it is the embrace of an "object" (the contents of Scripture, personified in Christ). This is not to say that Berkouwer would despise a "correct view" of Scripture, but simply that this is never an end in itself, but in a very real way only a beginning.

The Later Berkouwer

In the later phase of his thinking there is not only a fundamental change in Berkouwer's view of Scripture as God's Word, but also in his position with regard to Scripture as man's word. In his attempt to arrive at the proper outlook upon the humanity of Scripture he intends to avoid both what he calls a supernatural and an anti-supernatural approach. The first one, in his estimation, calls the Word of God a "miraculous phenomenon," and sees the mystery of Scripture in the light of supernaturalism. "It presupposed and stressed the supernatural origin of Scripture, and thus little attention was given to the actual historical origin of Scripture, or to the fact that men had written it."⁶⁷ The second one would hold Scripture to be a natural phenomenon and does form a threat to the divine aspect by its exclusive emphasis upon the humanity of Scripture. The former is typified by the mechanical theory of inspiration, the latter by an unrestricted criticism. Berkouwer appears well aware of the fact that the church resorted to the phrase "organic inspiration" in order to escape both extremes. It meant to honor both God as the principal author of Scripture and the Bible writers as instrumental authors. This term, however, is not acceptable to Berkouwer any more, without at least some important qualifications. After all, the words "organ" or "instrument" can serve the purposes of both supernaturalism and

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 297, 384. See also p. 277.

⁶⁷Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, p. 151. See also pp. 152ff.

anti-supernaturalism. An instrument can be quite mechanical and an organ can be quite independent. Neither term, therefore, guarantees *per se* that the divine and human elements will not be competitive of, limit, or threaten one another.

The only way to transcend this competition is to abandon all theoretical, formalized, efforts to settle the relationship between the divine and the human. Undoubtedly Berkouwer would classify Warfield's as well as his own earlier solution to the problem of the relationship of the divine and the human under the heading of such efforts. After all, whether the concept of *concursum* is used or not, Warfield and the early Berkouwer regard a book both, and simultaneously, divine and human and characterize that as an incomprehensible mystery and a praiseworthy wonder. The later Berkouwer simply sees in such approach the supernatural extreme exemplified, even if mechanical inspiration is rejected and organic inspiration is championed. For what is left of the importance of the human element? It is programmed by the divine factor, which blocks the human authors from making any significant contributions in the origin and composition of Scripture, other than their own style, and effectively prevents the critical-historical method from pointing them out.

But what, then, is the later Berkouwer's alternative that will transcend the competition of the divine and human element. He formulates this alternative in terms of Scripture as the God-breathed, prophetic-apostolic, human witness or testimony to Christ. The pivotal word is witness or testimony. Scripture is and remains a human word. The human will never dissolve into the divine aspect. But further, it is not simply and solely a human word. It is also God's Word, inasmuch as it is God-breathed and Spirit-related. Finally, it is not formally the Word of God, but only as and by virtue of the witness concerning Christ. Writes Berkouwer:

The mystery of the God-breathed Scripture is not meant to place us before a theoretical problem of how Scripture could possibly and conceivably be both God's Word and man's word, and how they could be "united." It rather places us before the mystery of Christ. . . . Every word about the God-breathed character of Scripture is meaningless if Holy Scripture is not understood as the witness concerning Christ. . . . The Word of God did not come to us as a great and isolated miracle but as a miracle and secret of Scripture, of the human witness empowered by the Spirit. . . . God's Word . . . does not return to him void but . . . is heard, understood, and proclaimed in the form of the word of human witnesses. It comes to us in the midst of an overwhelming multiformity of human witnesses, of human questions and answers of skepticism and trust, of faith and unbelief. . . .⁶⁸

With the word "witness" Berkouwer's view of Scripture stands and falls. It safeguards Scripture from being identified as the Word of God in a "supernatural"

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 162, 163, and 167.

fashion. This would dehumanize the authors in spite of a possible protest against the mechanical theory of inspiration. It also safeguards Scripture from being demoted to a fable in an "anti-supernatural" fashion. This would destroy the message of the authors. On the one hand, it is the only perspective from which the theopneusty of Scripture and the "taking into service" of the human authors can be understood. On the other hand, it is the only perspective from which the message remains in view. It seems that Berkouwer has achieved what he set out to do. Scripture as witness is fully man's word and fully God's Word, although not God's Word formally. This would destroy the humanity of Scripture (supernaturalism). At the same time, Scripture as witness is fully God's Word and man's word, although God's Word only because of its *scopus*. Without this the divinity of Scripture would be eliminated (anti-supernaturalism). Allegedly, the term "witness," in the way it functions in Berkouwer's later thinking, has enabled him to overcome the competition between the divine and the human element. Where the concept of *concursum*, in the final analysis fails, there the term "witness" succeeds.⁶⁹ Eventually the question must be asked whether this claim has a basis in fact.

Berkouwer's position with regard to the inerrancy of Scripture is an outflow of his view of the witness character of Scripture as to its human side.

Berkouwer apparently wishes to go beyond both the liberal accommodation theory and the post-Reformation inerrancy position. The first one he calls dualistic and rationalistic. Its aim is to separate the kernel from the husk by means of the scientific method. The second one he calls formalistic and monergistic. Its goal is to demonstrate the exactness and correctness of all data of Scripture on the basis of its divinity.

Neither one of these two approaches in Berkouwer's opinion has really understood the witness character of Scripture. This is Berkouwer's deepest objection to both--liberal accommodation theory and the post-Reformation inerrancy position.

This witness character implies, on the one hand, that Scripture is intensely human. As such it is time-bound and time-related. This means that the authors shared the views and conceptions of the period in which they lived, did not know anything more than their contemporaries about the sciences, and

⁶⁹Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift*, vol. II, pp. 48-49, discounts the idea that the *concursum* concept sheds any helpful light on the relationship between the divine and the human element. Only the perspective of the human witness can further our understanding. He talks about "totaal andere perspectieven, van waaruit de theopneustie alleen valt te verstaan. Het is het perspectief van het menselijk *getuigenis*." Regrettably this section is not found in *Holy Scripture*, which is only a partial translation of the two original volumes on Scripture. The fundamental importance Berkouwer attaches to the term witness is accentuated by his polemical stance against E. P. Clowney's criticism of this term and its use in modern thought. The usually mild-mannered Berkouwer condemns this criticism in no uncertain terms. At this point everything is at stake. See *Holy Scripture*, pp. 163ff. His attempt to back up his understanding of witness with Scripture references is not convincing.

held to the social structures, cultural patterns, and the specific customs peculiar to their age. Not only did the scientific method and biblical research show this, but also the historical nature of Scripture alerts us to this. To characterize previous levels of knowledge as error is objectionable to Berkouwer. It would be tantamount to losing sight of this historical nature.

On the other hand, this witness character does not exclude that Scripture is genuinely divine. Its divinity is bound up with its goal, its purpose, its message, its scope. Scripture is the witness to Christ, crucified and risen. This scope is centralizing and unifying. The many authors, with their many backgrounds and their many approaches, all give witness to the one Christ. Berkouwer does not tire in stressing that Scripture can only be read and understood in the light of its central scope. Any other approach is formalized and sterile. For an example of such approach Berkouwer points to the effects undertaken to establish that Scripture is either errant and unreliable or inerrant and reliable. In the first case inaccuracies and contradictions are emphasized. In the second case only the presence of difficulties with regard to facts or of a need for the harmonization of details is granted. Berkouwer's reaction is simply this. Both formalize the notion of error, when they equate it with correctness and exactness, and, therefore, both become irrelevant. The Scriptures are intensely human, with all that this entails. So what else can one expect but to come across facts that are inaccurate and details that cannot be harmonized. This is not a big thing, either to be stressed or denied. At the same time the Scriptures are genuinely divine because of their message and scope. By virtue of its witness to that scope, which is Christ crucified and risen, Scripture is totally reliable and absolutely infallible. Scripture could only be errant in the biblical sense of the word if its scope, its truth, would lack reality. Further, man can only err in that same sense of the word if he swerves from that scope, apostatizes from the truth as it is in Christ. It is highly ironical that both opponents and proponents of a formalized inerrancy may never have been confronted with the biblical message and, therefore, in the final analysis may hold to the practical errancy of Scripture and may have fallen victim to what really constitutes error.⁷⁰

In summary, Berkouwer sees in Scripture the God-breathed, human witness to Christ. As such it is both human and divine. Its divinity does not impinge upon its humanity. Biblical research is unrestricted. It may freely utilize the scientific approach, including the critical-historical and form-historical method. By the same token, its humanity does not impinge upon its divinity. It will joyfully focus its attention upon the message of Scripture and become captive to it.

It may be wise to insert at this point an example of how Berkouwer wishes to honor both the human and the divine side. In his early thinking he defended the traditional Reformed view of Genesis 1-3, in which the historicity of these chapters was fully maintained. He held that Adam and Eve were created and fell into sin exactly as it was described by the author. In his later thinking there is a fundamentally different approach. He speaks sympathetically about the new Roman Catholic theology that wishes to take into account the

⁷⁰Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 181-184, 189, 202-203, 242ff., 264-265.

literary, scientific, and historico-cultural background of these chapters on the one hand, and focus the attention upon their religious intent, on the other. Thus both the humanity of the author would be honored and the inviolability of the divine message secured. The upshot of this approach, in which supposedly respect was shown to Scripture by giving the original sense of the material its due, was among other things that monogenism was denied. The critical, literary, scientific, and historico-cultural method dictated this conclusion. But how can this be squared with Paul's teaching in Romans 5? The answer to this question is said to be simple. His teaching has to be read and understood in the light of the aforementioned conclusion. He apparently accommodated himself to an Old Testament image to suit his own purposes! The early Berkouwer registers a strong and eloquent protest against such approach. The later Berkouwer takes its critics to task! They fail to see that the method, exemplified by the new Roman Catholic theology, serves to clarify its message and bring it into a sharp focus. But what, then, is the message of Genesis 1-3? To confine ourselves to Genesis 1, Berkouwer holds that it is representative of Israel's polemical stance against mythical theogonies and aims to open a perspective to the incomparable nature of Yahweh. In spite of many protests to the contrary, the religious message seems to evaporate in generalities under the onslaught of the critical-historical method.⁷¹

In conclusion, the battle lines appear to be drawn. Warfield and Berkouwer prove, indeed, to be "point men" in the debate that rages about the nature of Scripture.

CONCLUSION

The positions have now been laid out. Warfield and the early Berkouwer hold that Scripture is the Word of God in the sense that the human words as God-breathed are a divine product. As such they are true, trustworthy, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative in every pronouncement that they make, in every subject matter that they address, and in every area that they speak, as well as fit to be the means of regeneration, justification, and sanctification. The later Berkouwer holds that Scripture is the word of man in the same sense in which every other human document is the word of man. At the same time, it is nevertheless in the act of faith proclaimed by the apostles and confessed by the church as the God-breathed Word of God by virtue of its witness to Christ.

As has been indicated already, both positions recognize a mystery. Warfield and the early Berkouwer find the mystery in the *way* in which God produces an infallible book through the mediation of fallible writers. They recognized this as a mystery because God had not seen fit to disclose the way from the origin (God) to the product (Scripture). The later Berkouwer finds the mystery in the *fact* that God uses a fallible book to convey a divine message. Berkouwer is forced to refer to this as a mystery because the realm of revelation and faith is not continuous with that of the written or spoken word. The former mystery is epistemological, the latter metaphysical in nature. As will be shown, Berkouwer's later approach is dialectical.

⁷¹Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, pp. 265ff.; *The Second Vatican Council*, pp. 119ff.; *De Heilige Schrift*, vol. 11, pp. 294-327, and *Holy Scripture*, pp. 292ff.

The fundamental difference of the two positions emerges specifically in their implications. Warfield and the early Berkouwer are armed with an infallible book as a divine gift that will enable them to address all men, at all times, in all places, in all circumstances, and in all areas of their lives, and give them specific directives. Much more than certainty is at stake. When the later Berkouwer states that the objection to a "controversial Bible" is rooted in the fear that the ground for certainty will be lost,⁷² at worst he puts up a "straw man," and at best he is only partially right. Scripture is a tool for a task, an instrument for a purpose, and a means to an end. It is given unto salvation, which consists of regeneration, justification, and sanctification. When God's people object to a "controversial Bible" it is not for a man-centered reason--loss of certainty--but for a God-centered reason. They will resist, as soldiers in the army of Christ, the blunting of the sword of the Spirit of God at all cost. They know that the loss of the tool will jeopardize the task, that the loss of the instrument will cloud the purpose, and that the loss of the means will endanger the end. They recognize, in the terms of the early Berkouwer, that biblical criticism will inevitably lead to "deChristianization" and secularization.⁷³ For that reason they wage the battle *for* the Bible. Salvation in all its component elements is at stake. They also recognize, again along with the early Berkouwer, that a formally "correct view" of Scripture is not sufficient. It must be accompanied with a submission to its authority and an assimilation of its contents. Otherwise, one is disqualified from the outset as a co-laborer with Christ. Against this backdrop the charge of "docetism" becomes preposterous. Precisely because Scripture is a divine product, it can be held confidently that it meets the needs of man infallibly, as it enters into the human predicament with the right diagnosis and the perfect cure.

The implications of Berkouwer's position are saddening in comparison. The question is inescapable. What precisely is the content, the message, the scope of the Scriptures? This is known supposedly through the words of Scripture as witness. But at this point a serious problem emerges. As a human document Scripture is within the range of the critical-historical method. The claim is, indeed, made that the result will be a better understanding of Scripture. But what guarantee is there that its content will not be reduced to an intolerable minimum? Berkouwer insists that the content itself guarantees this. But then the original question returns with even greater force. What precisely is the content of Scripture that controls the critical-historical method, which applies its "acids" to the words of Scripture, that in turn witness to the content of Scripture? Without further discussion of the vicious circle that is quite apparent in this question, the answer is finally this. The content of Scripture is divine, namely Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. But this will not do. The words, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, are not divine and cannot constitute the content of Scripture. They are at best a witness to the content of Scripture. As such they are open to the onslaught of the critical-historical method. Hence the question, "what precisely is the content of Scripture," has not been answered. Can it be answered at all? It appears not, because the content is not human, while every possible word is human and subject to all the liabilities connected therewith. The fundamental

⁷²Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 9ff.

⁷³Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, pp. 383-389.

problem is that the realm of the divine and the realm of the human are not continuous. They, indeed, presuppose one another. The content of Scripture is in need of the witness of Scripture. But they also exclude one another. The content of Scripture may not be identified with Scripture. They do not coincide at one single point. Both the correlation of revelation and faith and the charge of docetism are indicative of this essentially "dialectic" approach. As to the correlation, revelation is said to be open to faith only and may never be identified with Scripture. As to the charge, the human is said to vanish when the divine enters. Both the correlation and the charge are rooted in the bedrock conviction of the mutual exclusiveness of the divine and the human, and are not understandable apart from it.

In conclusion, the content of Scripture, upon the dialectic approach, is subject to an ever-increasing reductionism by virtue of the nature of the human element and is in principle unnameable by virtue of the nature of the divine element. The history of this approach demonstrates this. Barth writes an extensive systematic theology in reflecting upon the Word of God, as it is echoed in the words of Scripture. Bultmann criticizes Barth on two counts. He holds that Barth does not take either the nature of the human aspect, or the nature of the divine aspect sufficiently seriously. The former would require a much more radical application of the critical-historical method. The latter would demand the recognition that one cannot reflect upon the Word of God. In other words, Barth is supposed to be too timid as to the human aspect and too bold as to the divine aspect. Bultmann intends to remedy this situation. Since the Word of God is by definition beyond the reach of man, he reflects upon man as he responds to the Word of God. This appears to make him less bold. Further, by authority of the critical-historical method he declares that the content of Scripture is the act of God in Jesus Christ who graces man with authentic existence. He is, indeed, much less timid. The reduction of the content of Scripture is staggering. It is interesting to note that Bultmann's pupil Braun reduces the content even further. He questions the propriety to speak about God. Finally he defines this word as "a kind of co-humanity."⁷⁴ As a result of this type of thinking Barth criticized Bultmann's school for its "flat-tire theology."⁷⁵ It is equally interesting to note that Barth's pupil Ott inquires into the transcendental conditions for the usage of any language and any words whatsoever. Does any language and do any words, human as they are, have any naming power at all with regard to the divine? In these two pupils of Barth and Bultmann the dialectic approach has run its course. The content of Scripture is reduced to an intolerable minimum and appears to be in principle unnameable. A critic called both the schools of Barth and Bultmann, in spite of their seeming differences, "bloodless."⁷⁶ This point is well made.

⁷⁴H. Braun, *Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1962), pp. 337, 341.

⁷⁵K. Barth, *How I Changed My Mind* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 83.

⁷⁶H. Bock, in *Post Bultmann Locutum*, ed. H. Symanowski (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Herbert Reich, 1965), vol. II, pp. 57-58.

It must be seriously considered whether Berkouwer's failure to devote a separate chapter in his book *Holy Scripture* to the "content" of Scripture is not rooted in an impotence that is bound up with the dialectic approach. After all, the concept of the "content" is so central in the structure of his thinking that one might have expected a careful discussion of it. At any rate, Berkouwer's followers better be warned that the course they have taken will lead, in principle, to the inevitable loss of the content of the gospel.

This brings us to the final question. Why did Berkouwer move from his earlier to his later position?

Several observations are needed before an attempt is made to answer this question.

First, Warfield's writings did not succeed in preventing Berkouwer from changing his position. Space does not allow an evaluation of Warfield's apologetic method at this point. But it is commonly agreed that Warfield used basically an inductive methodology. It is apparent that in Berkouwer's case this methodology was not effective. In fact, it is ironic that induction had a decidedly negative influence on Berkouwer. After all, it was mainly the results of the critical-historical method that made him waver in his original stand. It should be noted at this juncture that the inductive method is never neutral.⁷⁷ It is a tool of a deeper lying conviction. Berkouwer failed to recognize this, as he was captivated by the alleged objectivity of the scientific approach.

Second, Berkouwer's early writings did not prevent the shift in his views either. Again, space does not allow the evaluation of the apologetic methods of the early and the later Berkouwer. But it may be stated that in his early thought he was thoroughly presuppositional. This is quite apparent in his *Problem of Biblical Criticism*.⁷⁸ His central thesis is that the critical-historical method in principle has no boundaries. Once it is unleashed, it can no longer be curtailed. Against this backdrop he characterizes the solution of neo-orthodoxy as a "way out."⁷⁹ Neo-orthodoxy distinguishes between the realm of ordinary history (*Historie*) and a realm that transcends ordinary history (*Geschichte*). The former is within reach of the acids of the critical-historical method. The latter is not. It is the contention of the early Berkouwer that the intolerable reductionism of the critical-historical method compelled neo-orthodoxy to posit a "storm free," "invulnerable," area as a "way out" of the difficulties produced by this method. This is, indeed, a plausible explanation of the historical development, but only from his own perspective. His major, presuppositional premise, to which he holds without wavering in his early phase, is that the Bible is a divine product and therefore an infallible book. His minor premise is that the critical-historical method is destructive for that book. His conclusion is that those

⁷⁷See Paper No. 11, where the philosophical presuppositions of inductivism are examined.

⁷⁸Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, pp. 219, 226, 248, 255, 257, 261, 275-278.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 60-61, 67, 83, and 92.

who espouse the critical-historical method must seek a "way out" for the predicament in which they find themselves. In his later writings Berkouwer sees more sharply, and more correctly, that neo-orthodoxy does not regard itself as seeking a "way out" of a predicament, but rather as presenting "the way" to the certainty of faith.⁸⁰ What is more important, however, is that there can be no doubt that the later Berkouwer endorses and adopts the neo-orthodox position. A comparison of Berkouwer's *Holy Scripture* and Barth's *Church Dogmatics* I, 2, which sets forth his view of Scripture, shows that there is basic agreement between the two men on Scripture as witness, the mystery of Scripture, the meaning of "est" in the formula *Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei* and the notion of kerygma.⁸¹ As to the latter, both are of the opinion that the certainty of faith does not rest upon an allegedly inerrant Bible, that would be unassailable to the reductionism of the critical-historical method, but upon the kerygma that is beyond the reach of this method. In his early writings Berkouwer is adamant that the kerygma cannot be regarded as proven "storm free" area.⁸² In his later thinking the shift is dramatic. The Bible has become "controversial." That leaves the kerygma as the only *apologia* to show that the way of faith is and remains accessible.⁸³ What was described by the early Berkouwer as a "way out," appears to be not only *the* way of neo-orthodoxy, but also *the* way of the later Berkouwer. What Berkouwer has failed to recognize, both in his earlier and later writings, that *the* way of neo-orthodoxy is *the* way of apostate thinking and possibly even of an apostate heart. This will not further be substantiated.

When man apostatizes from God and declares the throne of the universe vacant, the world in which he lives becomes immediately contingent and without order. Since man, however, cannot live in such a world, he introduces his own principle of necessity or order. Greek philosophy is a case in point. Heraclitus saw in this world an irrational flux without any real semblance of order, be it that he introduced a principle of order in terms of the logos. Parmenides gave the world the imprint of rationalistic necessity and set out to disprove the possibility of any movement whatsoever. Plato's goal was to effect a synthesis between the two types of philosophizing in which both the particulars and the universals would be accounted for. He distinguished to that end between a lower realm of matter (flux, particulars) and a higher realm of form (order, universals). Aristotle's philosophy was a variation on the same theme. He charged that there was no continuity between the two realms and introduced his theory of the immanent forms, in which the lower form functions as matter for the higher form and higher matter functions as form for lower matter in the chain of being. It is commonly agreed, however, that also Aristotle was not able to bring about the synthesis between the two poles. The reason is that he and his predecessors are trapped in their dialectic in which both poles mutually presuppose and preclude one

⁸⁰Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, p. 132.

⁸¹K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.2, pp. 19-22.

⁸²Berkouwer, *Het probleem*, pp. 96-109.

⁸³Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 37, 61, 138, 210, 214, 246-253, 327-345, 366; *Second Vatican Council*, pp. 124-134.

another. Disorder and order are both constituent elements of an apostate view of the world. But they can never be reconciled. They are discontinuous at every single point. It ought to be noted that in ancient thought the disorder pole was regarded as the greatest threat. Hence the primacy was assigned to the form pole. The ancients were fearful of the threat of the contingent, the lack of order and predictability. This is also visible in the Babylonian religions, where the chaos (world of the contingent) was supposedly offset by the cult (principle of order). The tragedy of this thought is that the real problem, namely of sin, is replaced by a pseudo-problem, namely of contingency and chance. The way of the "form" is proclaimed as *the* way. Not only, however, will it be unable to solve the pseudo-problem, but also, as the way of an apostate methodology, it will prove to be the way of death.

In modern thought a similar pattern emerges. Leibnitz saw the world as a rationalistic totality. Hume emphasized the contingent element. Kant attempted to synthesize both views in proposing a realm of nature (theoretical thought, necessity) and a realm of freedom (faith, contingency). Hegel rearranged the relationship between the two principles, but stayed faithful to the basic theme. Kierkegaard reacted violently against the rationalism of Hegel and emphasized the freedom realm in terms of the primacy of the momentary act of existential faith. Again, the basic dialectic becomes visible. At this juncture, however, the regimenting rationalism of the order pole (nature) is viewed as the greatest threat. The deep suspicions of the technocratic society is illustrative of this shift. The dialectic of modern thought is no different from that of ancient thought, but the field is reversed. The ancients emphasized the primacy of the order pole (form) as the answer to a disconcerting discontinuity. The moderns assign the primacy to the contingency pole (freedom) to save from a stifling rationalism. The way of the freedom pole now becomes *the* way. The nature pole, to be sure, has a definite autonomy, but the freedom pole transcends it, controls it, and limits it. In the meantime, the tragedy remains. The one pseudo-problem is substituted for another one. The "demonic" is now found in the abundance of regimentation. Once again the problem of sin is suppressed. Therewith also the new way of the old apostate methodology can be nothing else but the way of death.

Against this background the structure and danger of modern theology come into focus. They are the structure and danger of modern thought. Modern theology grants the critical-historical method a definite, but limited autonomy. At the same time, the content of the gospel transcends the realm of nature. As such it is inviolable. It is, indeed, not simply to be viewed as a way out. It is *the* way of a so-called gospel, that reflects a reality in which the realm of nature does not have the final word.

What a difference between *the* way of modern theology and the way of the biblical gospel. Modern theology is caught in the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, whatever the terminology may be. The language may resemble the Bible more (Barth) or less (Bultmann). But this is a peripheral matter. The biblical gospel takes sin and the divine solution to sin seriously. The implications of both ways have already been mentioned.

By now several things must have become clear.

First, it must have become clear why Warfield was commended for joining the fundamental issue when he stated that opposition to Scripture had either a rationalistic or "irrationalistic" root. Scripture becomes the target either of the one or of the other pole of the dialectic. In modern theology it became the target of both. The critical-historical method (rationalistic) reduced the content of the gospel. The revelation pole ("irrationalistic") determined that the content is in principle unnameable. On either count, Scripture may not be identified as a divine product that is infallible in its human form.

Second, it must have become clear why Berkouwer and his followers bring in the charge of Aristotelianism against those who in the footsteps of post-Reformation theologians hold to the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture as a human document. This view must appear as a rationalistic threat from the perspective of a dialectic approach that assigns the primacy to the "freedom" pole. This is not to say that post-Reformation theology is without any scholastic blemishes. But it *is* to say that the identification of Scripture and Word of God, as Warfield states and defends it, is not a rationalistic Aristotelianism.

This brings us back to the original question. Why did Berkouwer shift his position so radically? The answer to this question is not easy. Generally speaking, the adoption of a methodology that has the imprint of apostasy indelibly upon it and that is basically a dead-end street, may have one of two roots.

First, it is possible that an apostate methodology arises from an apostate heart. In this connection it must be maintained that the position that the rejection of biblical inerrancy is not a matter of "evangelical commitment, but of evangelical comprehension,"⁸⁴ is untenable. The rejection of biblical inerrancy may very well imply the lack of a heart's commitment to God.

Second, it is possible that an apostate methodology to a greater or lesser extent has slipped into the thinking of a man who is otherwise committed to Christ. In that case, however, it is not likely, to say the least, that he is conscious of the origin and nature of his conviction. It also must be questioned whether such person is guided by a competent leadership into, and has a sufficiently strong interest in, a holy life. Scripture teaches that God's people under such leadership and with such goal will not be swayed by every wind of doctrine (see Eph. 4:11-14). This pertains to an erroneous wind in the area of Scripture as well. Indeed, how can a person be swayed to blunt the sword of the Spirit when he sees it effectively used as an instrument of sanctification by the leadership of the church and experiences it as such in his own life? Finally, it ought to be recognized that such a person, if he is in a teaching position in the church of Christ, may have every intention to make a contribution to the Kingdom of God. But what guarantee does he have that he will escape building with wood, hay, and stubble? The consequences of this are serious (see 1 Cor. 3:12-15).

⁸⁴*Biblical Authority*, ed. Jack Rogers, p. 10.

In short, the rejection of biblical inerrancy appears to be indicative of the rebellion of one's heart or bound up with a deficiency in one's life. To call the matter of biblical inerrancy, therefore, an epistemological problem does not join the fundamental issue. Berkouwer and his followers are in the grip of a dialectic that arises from apostasy and can only arise from apostasy. This is the transcendental root of the structure of modern theology, the thought of the later Berkouwer, and the wholesale rejection of biblical inerrancy. Whether in any given case this root is present in the form of an apostate heart or of an apostate methodology only, cannot be determined in a paper. What can be determined, however, is that the grip of the dialectic, precisely because it is rooted in apostasy of one kind or another, can only be broken by repentance. Hence it is fitting that at the conclusion of this paper, and arising from its contents, an appeal is made for just that (2 Tim. 2:24-26).